





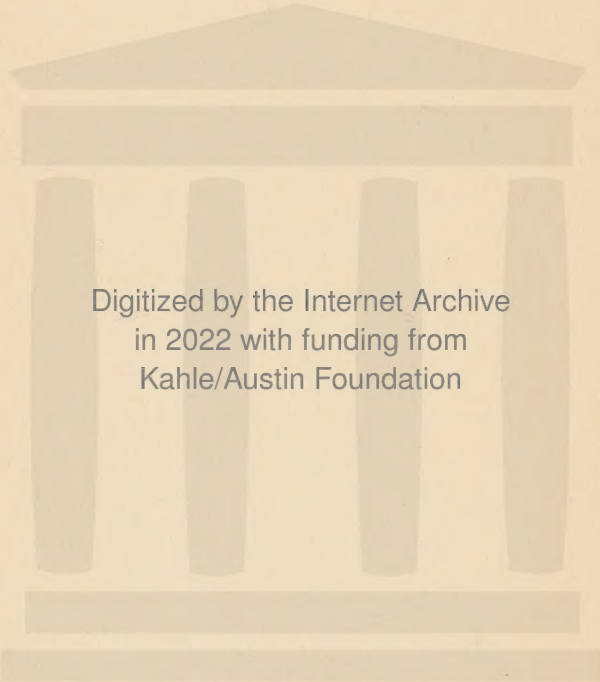
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# **SPRINGS IN THE DESERT**

**REV. J. H. JOWETT, D.D.**





# SPRINGS IN THE DESERT

STUDIES IN THE PSALMS

BY

REV. J. H. JOWETT, D.D.

Author of "The Friend on the Road," "The Eagle  
Life" "The Preacher," "Thirsting for  
the Springs," etc.



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SPRINGS IN THE DESERT

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## SPRINGS IN THE DESERT





# I

## THE MAKING OF A CYNIC

“He sitteth in the seat of the scornful.”

PSALM i. 1.

This sitting suggests a settled mood. The scorn is not an occasional thing, something that comes and goes, and never tarries long. It has come to stay. It has taken up its home there. There is an air of permanency about it. It is not a swift spasm of ill-feeling, born one moment and destroyed the next. It is a fixed habit. It is a residential feeling; it is a mood which knits the days together and runs throughout the life. The “seat of the scornful” is not a movable chair; it is an abode. This man has sat down to stay. He is not occasionally cynical; he *is* a cynic.

Now, what is a cynic? The etymology of the word introduces the features of a dog. And what is there dog-like about a cynic? A snarl. Who has not known the neigh-

bour's dog which crouches just behind the garden gate and snarls at every passer-by? The passer-by may be a little child, or it may be an old man; it makes no difference, there is a snarl for both. It may be a tinker, soldier, sailor; it is all the same, every one is snarled at as he goes along the way. No matter how genial your presence, or how cordial your word, or how gracious your errand, there is a bitter snarl for you as you pass the gate.

And that is the dog-like attitude which makes the cynic. He snarls at everything, and he sniffs and he sneers at everything. He is sarcastic and satirical. He is a disbeliever in the inherent worth of things. He has no confidence in the sincerity of others. He has a suspicion of every sort of courtesy, and he has a carping attitude to every social usage. He flings a mocking jibe at everything. He laughs at everything with bitter laughter. He suggests that there is a rotting decay at the heart of every beautiful thing. He cannot look at a flower without talking about the manure at its root. When others are admiring a lovely deed he hints at an unclean motive. Even a mother's love is

only an animal instinct, a fierce and merely selfish passion at the very heart of her affection. The cynic penetrates the lovely in search of the unlovely, and he is always sure that he finds it. You can hear his cruel laughter in the loveliest garden. You can hear his mocking cry in the sunny noon, or under the light of the midnight stars. Whatsoever things are ugly, the cynic thinks on these things.

What is the matter with him? He is suffering from a serious heart disease. His heart is soured. Now there is always a direct connection between the condition of the heart and the character of the sight. We cannot be careless about our heart and yet retain the accuracy of our vision. As is the heart so will be the eyes. "Blessed are the *pure* in heart, for they shall *see* God." That is the supreme example of the law, but the law has a hundred negative applications, and every one of them proclaims that a defect in the heart will be registered in a corresponding defect in the sight. If there is moroseness in the heart there will most certainly be perversity in the outlook. If the soul is soured the vision will be veiled, and the veil

will be as a tinted lens which confuses the natural colours of all things. Suppose you look at the world through a yellow pane of glass. Why, then you have a yellow world. Suppose you look through a dirty pane of glass. Why, then everything is defiled. Suppose you look at everything through the yellow pane of jealousy, or the red pane of envy—why, then you disfigure everything. And if you look at things through a soured disposition you will not see anything that is lovely or sweet. The cynical heart has a charmless world.

And how does a man become a soured man, a scornful man, a cynic? The order of the verse in this psalm outlines the process of his creation. The process begins when a man begins to listen to evil counsels—"the counsels of the ungodly." That is to say, he opens his mind in ungodly hospitality, and he lets in the germs of evil conduct. You cannot keep your milk sweet and yet let anything into your dairy; one dirty germ can sour an entire milking. And when an evil counsel is given welcome into a sweet mind, it begins its defiling and souring work. When we begin to cherish low ideals, we



speedily begin to act in ungodly ways; we choose our company, we seek the fellowship of the unworthy, we "stand in the way of sinners." There is only one further step in the process, sinful conduct is creative of sinful and settled disposition. Every act helps to create an attitude. Every deed tends to fashion a mood. We are soured by our own misdeeds. We become cynics, and we sit in the seat of the scornful.

I know only one way in which a cynic can be made sweet. He must be born again. Superficial remedies are entirely ineffective. Do what we will we cannot cleanse this dairy! But there is a fountain open for sin and uncleanness: "Lord, if thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean."

## II

### GROWING IN IMPRISONMENT

“Thou hast enlarged me when I was in distress.”

PSALM iv. 1.

The imprisoning experience becomes the minister of strong and healthy growth. When the Psalmist drew near to the unwelcome circumstance its face was filled with gloomy frowns. When it “gat hold” upon him it seemed to cripple and belittle him. It would surely break him all to pieces! But it turned out to be the means of his enlargement. It seemed to shut him in when it was in reality opening him out. The circumstance looked like an instrument of depression, crushing him into the dust, and it was truly a minister of elevation lifting him into larger circles of life. He was enlarged when he was in distress.

There are untold multitudes of people who have shared the Psalmist’s experience.

Their life was moving in broad, quiet waters of happy experience, and the glow of contentment filled their hearts from morning until night. And then their life became suddenly contracted, and they were imprisoned in gloomy necessity. Their life had been like a boat, sailing along the free open waters of a canal. The boat passes out of the sunny openness into the deep imprisoning walls of a lock. There is a closed gate in front, and a gate is shut behind. The boat is held in the narrowest and gloomiest confinement. But into the locked circle the waters pour from a higher level, and the boat begins to rise in its imprisonment, and soon the forward gate is opened, and the boat moves out on an elevated plane.

And life has its imprisoning locks. God shuts us in. Doors are closed before and behind us, and it is God's hand which does it. We seem to lose our freedom. We cannot go as we would. We lose the open vision. We lose the inviting vista which stretched before us like a shining hope. And then into our forced seclusion there come the waters of life, and we begin to rise. We may not be conscious that we are rising, but

our ignorance does not affect the reality. When God, the merciful Guardian, who watches over Israel, opens the forward gate and restores our freedom, we begin to know what has happened. Life opens out in new and larger reaches. We are on higher planes of being. We have finer powers of discernment. We have a bigger outlook. We have risen in our adversity, and our God has enlarged us in our distress.

Who has not known people whose sympathies have grown larger in their sorrows? They have begun to think differently. As a sick friend of mine, who had never been sick before, said to me: "My! but things look differently from the horizontal!" Yes, indeed! we begin to think differently about many things, and we begin to think about some things which have never crossed our minds before. We become conscious of grim necessities in the world of which we have never dreamed. We had no idea such things were in existence. A whole world of sickly, suffering folk come into sight. Humanity becomes more than an abstraction; it is a kindred, a brotherhood, and we thrill to new relations as we become the children

of a new experience. Our sympathies are enlarged, and they are enlarged when we are in distress.

And so it is with the spiritual world. It often grows upon us when we are laid aside and shut within the narrow circle of distress. We see more of it through our tears. We are brought low and strange new things emerge. I have heard that men who look up from the bottom of a deep pit can see the stars at noon. I do not know about that, but I do know that when men and women are sunk in the pit of adversity and sorrow and look up, stars of promise troop out to bring them cheer. They see wonderful things which once were very far off. And so I begin to see the truth of the old Italian proverb: "When God shuts a door He opens a window."

### III

#### WORSHIPPING WITH BANNERS

“I will come into Thy house in the multitude of Thy mercy.”

PSALM V. 7.

This is the word of a single worshipper, and yet he seems to be attended by a multitude of singing comrades. His mercies attend him like a shining host. He goes to God's house, leading an endless retinue of gracious things which he has called together from the days and years that are gone. He blew his silver trumpet for worship, and old mercies came thronging around him, and he went into God's house like some conqueror marching with banners. It is a triumphal procession.

If we change two of the words we shall be conscious of a startling difference, for we shall pass from springtime into winter. “I will come into Thy house in the multitude of my complaints.” The wedding has be-

come a funeral, and the dead are burying their dead. This man blew a doleful trumpet and he summoned a retinue to attend him to the house of God, and dark complainings began to assemble, and dull grumblings, and nipping peevishness, and a hundred gloomy fashions of ingratitude—and these black regiments attend him to the holy place of the Most High. This is not a fancy picture. It is an allegory with a core of vital truth. Let a man examine himself, and let him carefully know the character of his attendants when he ventures into the presence of God. Do bright things answer his call, things bearing the marks of heavenly love and grace, or are they dingy things, stingy things, ungracious things, things gathered from the streets of ingratitude and the haunts of discontent? This is the kind of challenge we should address to our souls. Is there much praise in our worship, or is there much complaint? Is it song or is it wail? Is its atmosphere a bleak forgetfulness, or is it light with thankfulness and happy memory? What is our retinue in God's house? Let each one go through his ranks and know the truth.



Where did the Psalmist find the multitude of mercies which thronged him when he sought the presence of the Lord? He made time to look for them and to call them from their hiding. For it is one of the strangest things in life how the mercies of God can be overlooked and forgotten. Dark things linger in the memory while the bright ones pass away. December makes a deeper mark upon the consciousness than June. The lightning is recalled when the light is forgotten. The floods abide in the recollection where the gentle rains have no place. And thus memory is apt to be a very perverting minister in worship unless we deliberately rouse her from her sleep and command her to gather together the sheep which she has lost. And this is what I think the Psalmist did. These Old Testament Psalmists had a way of talking to themselves in a very living and awaking fashion. And this one seemed to say, "My soul, I am going into the house of God to hold communion with God. Let us rouse the memory, and let us go through the highways and byways of other days summoning the mercies of the Lord. Let us seek through yesterday to

far-off yesterdays." And so they did. And from every side the mercies of the Lord trooped out, hundreds of them, thousands of them, mercies of strangely varied sorts, until the worshipper was exultant in the midst of the shining host. And in the fellowship of this company he entered into the secret place of the Lord, and as he went he sang in happy prelude, "I will come into Thy house in the multitude of Thy mercy."

Robert Louis Stevenson, writing about somebody to one of his friends, has this word: "I will think more of his prayers when I see more of his praise." It is a good test, for it is a sure revelation of our spiritual worth. But praise is more than revelation; it is victory. "Verily," says Apollinaris in Ibsen's play, "Emperor and Galilean," "so long as song rings out above our sorrows, Satan shall never conquer!" And, therefore, always and everywhere let us walk before the Lord with thankfulness and praise.

## IV

### A QUENCHLESS FIRE

“A God that hath indignation every day.”

PSALM vii. 11.

Our sacred fire does not burn every day. It burns only intermittently. It has occasional flares, when it leaps up with fierce intensity, but it soon dies down, and smoulders, or goes quite out. It is like a bonfire of tarred wood; it has a spasm of fervency, but no steady and continual glow. When the revelation of some moral outrage first appears we burn with hot antagonism. But if the outrage continues, and we become accustomed to its presence, our healthy indignation begins to subside. Our very familiarity with an evil is apt to damp our fires. The very evil which kindles our anger smothers it by its continuance.

All of which means that there comes a stage where our holiness ceases to be shocked at the presence of the unholy. Our holiness is not healthy enough, and therefore not

sensitive enough, to retain its power of repulsion. It does not possess a glorious sense of offence. It is not strong enough to maintain its distance. What it first loathed it now tolerates, and it is almost inevitable that when we tolerate a wrong we begin to fraternise with it. In this realm the absence of antagonism means the birth of fellowship. Friendly messages pass between the trenches and we begin to cherish what we were intended to destroy. Our very presence, which should have consumed the evil, quickens it, just as a congenial climate fosters some deadly plague.

Now God's holiness is altogether different. His indignation never burns low in the presence of wrong. When iniquity raises its head His light is always lightning. "Out of the throne proceeded lightning!" God's holiness never tolerates sin. His holiness never becomes so lukewarm as to be amiable to seemingly small revolts. "Whosoever shall break one of the least of these commandments!" It is jealous for fidelity in small affairs. It is angry with the infidelity that shows its face in the apparent trifle. And why? Because the spirit of

outrageous sin can enter the sacred circle through a neglected scruple. The burglar can get into the house through a little unfastened window in the scullery. Smallpox may be spread by a penny as well as by a pound note. And it is little use working up indignation against mighty epidemics if we are coldly negligent about the single germs. But this also is one of our dangers. Our fires blaze in crises, but they do not burn against the smaller things which make them. Our indignation does not burn every day either against great wrongs which have become familiar, or against the lesser wrongs which are the breeding beds of more sensational sins. "God hath indignation every day!" In the presence of wrong God is always aflame. "Our God is a consuming fire." He will not parley with sin, but He will burn it in unquenchable fire.

If we would share His holy fire, we must share His holiness. If we would share His holiness, we must be partakers of His love and grace. To be greatly angry we must have the power to greatly love. "He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire."

## V

### THE VISION OF GOD

“I have set the Lord always before me.”

PSALM xvi. 8.

This is the real practice of the Presence of God. It is the endeavour to see everything in the light of that Presence, and never to regard anything as detached from the divine relationship. In the flat miles of country round about Lincoln, everything can be viewed in relation to its noble cathedral, uplifted there on the mount. Whether you are toiling in the fields or walking along the road, or sitting by the way, the cathedral is ever before you, throwing its sacred suggestiveness over every common lot. And to have the Lord always before us on the broad plains of daily life, overlooking our playfields and our battlefields, our place of business and our place of worship, the green pastures and the green churchyard—this is to cultivate the vision of God. “I saw the

Lord, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple.”

Now this kind of vision is not easily attained, nor can it be gained in a day. It was said of the late Bishop Westcott that “he only saw because he took time to see.” That is where so many of us miss it. We do not give time to see. We are so feverish in action that we have no leisure for vision. We are more concerned about movement than we are about direction. We are more ambitious to have the wheels going round than we are to receive the divine sanction. And so the plain has no towering cathedral. The day is not overlooked by the Eternal. Life has no sacred mount.

It has been said that the poet is one who “sees the infinite in things.” Then in a very rich degree we can all be poets, seeing the Infinite in our ordinary work, or in the country lane, or amid the festivities of a wedding, or in the shadows by an open grave. We can verily “set the Lord always before us.”



## VI

### THROUGH PRISON TO FREEDOM

“He brought me forth also into a large place.”

PSALM xviii. 19.

These words came into my mind some weeks ago when I was sailing up the Thames. It was to me an unfamiliar stretch of waters. Everything was strangely beautiful. The trees that lined the river banks; the frequent glimpses into the recesses of dark woods; the occasional breaking of the lines, and the surprising vistas of open country; the play of the waterfowl; little children paddling here and there, and their shouts of joy; in quieter places the songs of birds! It was very beautiful. And then we left it all and were shut up in a lock. We were imprisoned within stone walls and iron gates. Not a green thing could be seen. Not a bird could be heard. But in our imprisonment we began to rise. Shut in, we began to be lifted up; until, when we reached the

appointed height, the forward gate swung open and we continued our journey on a higher level.

And all this became the parable of common experiences in human life. Who does not know God's locks along the river? Who has not had the surprises of being seemingly taken away from joyful progress between the green and happy banks and shut up within black and clammy stones? At such seasons it seems as though we have passed from joyful movement to depressing stagnancy. But in reality the movement has only changed. We have ceased to go on and we have begun to go up. We have been lifted into heavenly places in Christ Jesus. God has redeemed us into higher levels, and when freedom has been restored we find that He has brought us out into a larger place. The lock was the minister of elevation. The place of imprisonment was the birthplace of a larger life.

Sometimes we have been shut up within the stony prison of a gloomy disappointment. Our ambitions have been checked. Our radiant boat has been stayed. And the song has died away. But God has used the

dark home of disappointment to minister to another kind of progress. We begin to realise more clearly the "upward calling in Christ Jesus." Ambition is changed into aspiration. We rise to higher things. Wonderful deliverances have been wrought in the chill season of disappointment, and God has brought us forth into a larger place. "The things that happened unto me have turned out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel."

Or it may be that we have been shut up in the narrow lock of sickness. All the ordinary movements in life have stopped. And it seemed to be such a waste. Just to lie on one's back! And then the "upward" ministries began to lay hold of us, the wonderful things which are from above. And we rose to higher levels of thinking, and feeling, and praying. More of Christ came into our lives, and more Christ-communion. There was more thoughtfulness, and more gentleness, and more vision. And when God opened the gate on the further side, and let us out again, we could certainly sing with the Psalmist, "In my distress Thou hast enlarged me."

## VII

### LARGE STANDING

“He brought me forth also into a large place.”

PSALM xviii. 19.

That is always the end of the Lord's leadership. He brings us out of narrow places, where we have but little standing, and He sets our feet in a large place. He gives us big ground to stand upon. We have been cramped in a small expediency and He leads us into the enlargement of a spacious purpose. Or we have been cribbed in a petty rule and He brings us into the fine air of a splendid principle. Or we have been dwelling in little sentiments, and He leads us forth into a vast and holy love. Or we have lived in party prejudice, and He has brought us into a comprehension of truth. This is the way of the Lord. It is His gracious will that the soul should have fine standing, and should move in the glorious liberty of the Son of God.

It is easy to tell when a soul has been wonderfully led into a large place, as it is easy to know when a soul is held captive in a tiny cabin. In politics it is the difference between the politician and the statesman. In religion it is the difference between the ecclesiastic and the saint. It is the difference between the poetic and the prosaic, between severely conventional living and a large life of spiritual vision and aspect. Who does not know the difference between a man who takes up a thing from small motives and the man who stands upon big ground in all his enterprises and ambitions? It is the difference described by our Lord: some are "from above," and others "from beneath."

It is the man who stands upon big ground who alone can tackle matters of tremendous moment. He alone can endure through the dark and cloudy day. The very largeness of his standing protects him from the fears which are bred of unproportioned thoughts. He looks out upon affairs with a true and fine perspective, and he does not confuse the early battle with the long campaign. He does not fear "when heat cometh." He has the calmness which is the offspring of

magnanimity. He has the fear of the Lord, and in that large fear no other fear can breathe.

Our God is the God of the large places! It is the wonderful privilege of the believer to sit in heavenly places with Christ Jesus and to think and labour in the very mind of Christ.

## VIII

### SALVATION IN EXTREMITY

“Yea, from the horns of the wild oxen Thou hast answered me.”

PSALM xxii. 21.

Here is a man proclaiming that he has found deliverance from the very jaws of death. He has been saved in the extreme limit of peril when salvation seemed humanly impossible. The wild oxen were out. They had overtaken him and he was just about to be impaled. The breath of death was upon him. And when no earthly ministry could intervene between him and destruction, he was rescued by the merciful providence of the Lord. “Yes, from the horns of the wild oxen Thou hast answered me.”

Is this salvation, even in the very leap of death, a vital part of the evangel of our day? How far do we go in our proclamation of the saving grace of God? Are we telling

everybody that God can deliver from the horns of the wild oxen? Or is there something lame in our assurance, and does our evangel consequently stammer in hesitancy and reserve? Unless we can speak of salvation in uttermost extremity in a confident tone that will arrest and startle the world, we have really nothing worth saying at all. What can be done for men and women when the wild oxen are upon them? This is the crux and test of our religion. When a herd of wild passions are goring some poor soul to death, has our gospel any invincible means of deliverance? When a life is all broken to pieces, and is registered in the lists of human judgment as absolutely hopeless, do we know a secret that can stagger and beat the wild oxen, not only setting the victim free, but restoring him to health and wholeness again? Are there any circumstances where the wild oxen are most assuredly the lords of the field?

It has been the glory of all great preaching that its evangel has covered the most awful perils in human necessity. It has proclaimed its good news to men and women who were



in the murderous grip of apparently certain destruction. It has sung of dawn at the midnight. It has sung its songs at the very mouth of hell. I delight to turn over the pages of John Wesley's *Journal* and note with what untrembling confidence he brings his gospel to the field where the wild oxen are goring their victims to death. "This morning I went and offered free salvation to four condemned felons in Newgate gaol!" There are hundreds of entries just like that. They are the words of a herald who had invincible faith in the power of redeeming grace. Let the wild oxen be foaming and tearing up the ground in their rage, here is the assured secret of salvation!

Are we saying these things as they ought to be said to-day? Or are we afraid of seeming too dogmatic? Have we the note of certainty that cuts through hesitancies and ambiguities as the clarion notes of a bugle ring through the confused murmurs of a market place? Do we believe that our Lord can save even unto the uttermost? Is His grace all-sufficient? Can His blood make the foulest clean? This would surely

be good news, and it is the news which, more than anything else, the world is waiting to hear to-day. Our Lord can answer from the horns of the wild oxen! Such is the power of redeeming grace.

## IX

### MY LEADER

“He leadeth me.”

PSALM **xxiii.** 2.

A guide-post is one thing, a guide is quite another. It is helpful to have written instructions; it is far more helpful to have the leadership of a companionable friend. We might acquire an art from a text-book, but how infinitely more delightful it is to acquire it from a competent teacher. It is the vital human presence which tells. It is the living fellowship which takes the length out of the long road and fills it with inspiring interest from end to end.

And in the unknown way of life we have a comforting Presence. We have the help of the guide-post, which is our conscience. We have the counsel of the guide-book, which is the Bible. But we have something better than both—we have the Lord of the road who erected the guide-post; we have

the all-wise Counsellor who inspired the guide-book. The good Lord does not guide us by maxims or rules. He gives us Himself. "*He leadeth me.*" "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." "The Lord Himself is thy Keeper."

And so this is the wonderful prospect for the unknown journey of life—the communion of the Holy Spirit. His companionship is not conditioned by the nature of the road. He will not desert me when the way becomes rough and difficult. Nay, He reserves His choicest inspirations for the sternest parts of the road. He has songs for the night. He has cordials for the oppressive day. He has everything that heart can wish or need! "*He leadeth me.*" I will trust and not be afraid.

## X

### THE GREEN PASTURES AND THE OPEN ROAD

“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. . . . He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness.”

PSALM xxiii. 2, 3.

The green pastures and the open road! Here are two symbols which unveil two vital aspects of the spiritual life. There is, first of all, the figure of the green pastures which represent the rich fulness of the divine resources for a tired and exhausted soul. There is the suggestion of rest, and satisfaction, and restoration. Amid the soothing ministries of pastoral peace new life flows into spent muscle and wearied nerve. The nourishment more than balances the fatigue. Contentment wipes out the memory of exertion and toil. “He restoreth my soul.” The good Lord meets the soul in fields of quietness, and it is as when the angels sang over the fields of Bethlehem in comforting strains of peace and good will.

The second figure is the figure of the open road—"the way of righteousness." The circumstances seem to be entirely changed. There is no longer the moist sweetness of the nourishing meadow. There is now the tedious path, the wayward, endless road, the dust, the flints, the long and seemingly endless journey. It is no longer lying down, but walking, walking, walking! "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness." The soul is out on the open road, and its Shepherd is leading on. Such is the second figure.

Well, now, the peril about these two figure is this—we may regard them as if they were offered to us for our choice, and as though we can prefer the one and reject the other. We can choose to be knights of the green pasture, delighting in the proffered luxuriance, or we can choose to be knights of the open road, revelling in the dusty exploit, nourishing ourselves on difficulty and struggle, and almost despising the multitude who remain in fields of pleasantness and peace. Whichever choice it be, if it be a rejection of the other, our spiritual life will be gravely impaired.

There is a type of spirituality which is

born and nourished in green pastures. It is for ever seeking nice things, sweet things, pleasant things, peaceful things. It loves to get apart. It delights in long retreats. It revels in the atmosphere of conferences and withdrawn communion. It has a growingly large library on the secrets of the higher life. It joins any and every league except the league for routing out bandits on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho, or the league for slaying dragons wherever they infest the lives of men. And so this is a sort of spirituality which lacks tone and virility. It needs more red corpuscles in its blood. Its piety is pale and anæmic. And I think that if in this world of green pastures and still waters there is a quiet cemetery where dead devotion is buried, many a grave would have to carry this epitaph, "Passed away in decline through sheer neglect of the open road."

On the other hand there is a sort of spirituality which lives on the road. It is always "on the go." It is practical, and ever practical, and it has no leisure for the use of green pastures or still waters. It is too busy to go apart and rest awhile. The

calls are too clamant for any heed to be paid to the lures of rest. It has no time for thinking things through because it is so intent upon seeing them through. It has no time for praying because it is so devoted to working. "Laborare est orare!" That is the motto, and they keep at it night and day. And what is the result? They become over-driven. They lose the fine and nobly proportioned sense of things. They become supersensitive, which is only another way of saying that they become insensitive to large issues. They are apt to become shallow. And often they become irritable and critical, and they fall into murmuring and complaint. "Lord, speak to my sister, and bid her that she help me in service." That is the speech of one of the overwrought, the folk who have been too long on the road, and who greatly need the quieting, restoring ministries of the green pastures and the still waters which are the precious provisions of divine grace. There is many a splendid knight on the open road whose loyalty is suffering and whose labour is maimed because he will not turn aside with his Leader



into the deep and deepening secrets of rest. They are "tired to death."

Now it is the gracious purpose of our Lord that the ministries of the green pastures and the open road are to be mutual and complementary. Our Saviour continually mentions them as being equally essential to the perfecting of His will. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest!" It is the Lord's call to the green pastures! "My peace I give unto you!" It is our Lord's bequest by the still waters. But joined to these is His call to the open road. "Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you!" "He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness." This is the minister of the journey, the offer of some splendid commission, the chance of a great adventure. The soul which has been secluded with Him in arbours of rest is now carrying the secrets of rest into valiant works of righteousness and doing His will on earth as it is done in heaven.

It is even so in all the teachings of the Apostle Paul. Take, for example, his letter to the Ephesians. What a combination it

is of green pastures and open road! The earlier part leads us into the deep and unfathomable things which concern our peace. We move with reverent rapture among God's infinite provisions for the soul's eternal rest. The wonders pass the powers of human speech, and the soul goes beyond the ministry of words into the riches of wordless contemplation. But the letter which leads the soul into these entrancing mysteries also leads it into the activities of the open road. How many times does the apostle call us from the restoring rest of contemplation to the invigorating habits of a healthy and out-of-doors spiritual life! How many times does he use the figure of walking, which is just outdoor movement on the venturesous way! "Walk in love!" "Walk in the light!" "Walk as children of light!" What is all this but spiritual knighthood on the march, going on and on to works of chivalry and freedom! And thus does the apostle's letter unite the ministries of spiritual peace with the calls of the open road.

And when I turn to the last part of the sacred Book, where we have glimpses of the

final issue of things, some of the happenings beyond the boundaries of time and death, I look on a similar spiritual landscape, a combination of green pastures and open road. I open the Book on one page, and I read of the Shepherd, now the Lamb of God, leading His flock to "fountains of living water." It is the secret wealth of the green pastures. I open another page, and I see the Lamb of God, wearing "a vesture dipped in blood"—mark you, not the blood of another, but His own blood, for this is the royal insignia of self-sacrifice—and on chivalrous venture He is out on the open road. And where are they who companied with Him in the green pastures? This is the answer: "These are they that follow the Lamb *whithersoever He goeth!*" They are out with him on the open road!

## XI

### THE HARD THINGS IN THE 23RD PSALM

The twenty-third Psalm is one of those lovely creations of the Spirit which every expositor fears to touch lest he should bruise it in the handling. It is like fingering a cluster of grapes as it hangs in tender bloom upon the vine. It is like touching anything where touching is perilous, and where beauty can easily be marred. But, strangely enough, in the very middle of the psalm there are some hard and difficult things. First of all, there are toilsome roads of duty which are called "paths of righteousness." And then there is a narrow and fearful passage of gloom which is called "the valley of the shadow." And, in the third place, there is a ring of encompassing foes which is set forth in the phrase, "In the midst of mine enemies." What is there in front of these difficult places? What is there behind them? In front of them, and behind them, and in the very midst of them, there is the astound-

ingly rich provision which the good Lord has made for pilgrims who have to go through them, so that they may march along in holy triumph, rather than stumble along in paralysing fear.

Well, then, there are these roads of duty, the paths of righteousness. Who is there who finds it easy to walk in straight paths? How is it with the path of straight thinking, with no perverse crookedness, and every thought as straight as truth? How is it with the path of straight desiring, no wish wriggling in obliquity, but every aspiration running in the line of rectitude? How is it with the path of straight willing, every choice resisting the enticement of the evil lures? Are these paths easy? The Apostle Paul writes of "a crooked and perverse generation," and it is in the midst of such moral twistings and turnings that believers in God are to maintain a straight course, and take the road of hallowed duty, the path of righteousness which is the path of peace. "He leadeth me in paths of righteousness."

And then there is the valley of the shadow. There is nothing in the original word which compels us to accept the suggestion of death.

Indeed, the margin of the Revised Version gives us the alternative rendering, "the valley of deep gloom." This valley may have nothing to do with death. It may rather represent those hard experiences in life when the devil appears to be more powerful and more in evidence than God. Devilry seems to be rampant on every side, grinning and mischievous, and apparently triumphant. This is surely the most appalling valley of gloom when the soul is tempted to doubt the interest and activity of God, and to assume that evil is more alive than the Lord. "When I walk through the valley of gloom I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me."

And the third of the hard places is the place of the encircling foes, "In the midst of mine enemies." Who does not know these besetments? Sometimes these are sins that chase us across the years, full of the menace of destruction. Sometimes temptations get round about us. Sometimes sorrow rings us round and we cannot see a way out. In all these experiences it may appear that the enemy had us fast in his gloomy prison. And yet, blessed be God, "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies."

What may the loyal pilgrims expect to find on these roads which are full of difficult places? They will find the green pastures of evangelical truth. They will find the quiet waters of the promises of grace. They will find the oil of spiritual refreshment, the unction of the Holy One, the joy of the Holy Ghost. And they will find a sort of rear-guard of grace, goodness and mercy coming on behind, shielding them from the assaults of their yesterdays, intervening between them and their old sins. "Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."

## XII

### THE OVERFLOWING CUP

“My cup runneth over.”

PSALM xxiii. 5.

It is the suggestion of abundance which is conveyed in these most familiar words. The guest is in the tent of his host, and there is no hint of stinginess in the hospitality. It is not as in Cana of Galilee when the good man of the feast had the horrible surprise of discovering that they were running short of wine almost before the feast had well begun. One can dimly imagine the thoughts and feelings of the guests at the wedding. There would be many a sidelong glance as the mean measures were handed round. There would be much significant lifting of the brows. There would be many a whispered interpretation of the shortage, and the interpretations would never err on the generous side. But the irritation of the guests was nothing compared with the discomfort of the host;



he was horrified until all his trouble was ended by the gracious courtesy and power of the Lord.

But the Psalmist's Host has made no mean provision. Nor are His supplies just level with the demand. The grace of the Lord does not just balance the necessity and leave nothing over. There is always a surplus at the feast. The want is met with abundance. Satisfaction culminates in wonder. This man's cup runneth over! And that is everywhere the Scripture teaching concerning the boundless hospitality of the divine Host. We are cheered by the promise that whatever necessity we bring to the door of our Father's house is welcomed with overflowing goodness, and the need is absolutely buried in the multitude of God's mercies. Let us glance at one or two of these grim necessities, and see the kind of entertainment they receive.

Here, then, is a familiar sentence which reveals the overflowing bounty: "Where sin aboundeth grace doth much more abound." That is an almost surprising encounter. I did not imagine that anything could be bigger than my sin. It was the biggest thing

I knew. If I take time, and let my mind and memory run across the years, my sin seems to pile up to mountain heights! This is true even of the sins I can remember. But there are countless others which memory cannot recall. And there are all those which an evil nature never recognises as sin—the sophistries which moved about as decent presences; the things which I labelled “smartness,” “cleverness,” and then persuaded myself that the labels made them so; the sins of aggression; the sins of neglect; the sins of indolence and indifference! Mountains of them!

And when I bring these mountainous things to the Lord, what then? Where sin abounds, what then? “Grace doth much more abound.” There is a bigger thing than my sin. Sin is out-topped by grace. Out-topped! Ay, as Mount Everest out-tops the hills that reveal themselves from my chamber window. Out-topped? Ay, as a child’s sandheap is overwhelmed by the incoming weight and glory of God’s amazing sea. “There’s a wideness in God’s mercy like the wideness of the sea.” Yes, and a depth, too. And all this is true, true in the

experience of all humble, believing souls who lay their dark necessity before the Lord. It is met and countered by God's grace, and the grace of God in Christ Jesus buries our guilt and sin as in an unfathomable sea. Grace does not just meet our sin in uncertain balancings; it buries it altogether. The forgiveness is not stingy. Our cup runneth over.

Here is another sentence revealing the fulness of the Divine hospitality. "They gathered of the fragments that remained, twelve baskets full." No wonder that the prodigal son, thinking of such a Host, said: "In my Father's house there is bread enough and to spare." Recall some of the deep and varied hungers of the soul. Think of the hunger for Divine union. Think of the hunger for the perfecting of all our powers. Think of the hunger for the peace which is spiritual harmony, and for the joy which is spiritual health. And bread is needed for all these hungers. And, blessed be God, all our cravings are the pledges of their fulfilment. The very variety of our hungers is an index to the manifold grace of the Lord. Our hungers are our school-

masters to bring us to Christ. And when we come to Him there is bread enough and to spare. The half hath not been told. God's hospitality buries our necessity. His bounty overwhelms our needs.

And so on God's side the gifts are always abounding. His measure is good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over.

## XIII

### THE OVERFLOWING CUP

“My cup runneth over.”

PSALM xxiii. 5.

My cup runneth over! Such is the measure of the bountiful hospitality of God. There is no leanness or meanness in His feasts. His provision is never scanty. His resources never come short of our necessity. Nor are they just level with our needs, leaving no margin of grace. The Divine Host welcomes his guests to overflowing bounty. “In My Father’s house there is bread enough and to spare.” My cup runneth over.

This magnificent fulness dwells in every promise of the Lord and it gives radiant distinction to all the ministries of His love. I look at my sin. It is the biggest thing I know. It is piled up like some gloomy, barren mountain in the landscape of my life. I can do nothing with it. If I set myself to the task of removal it is like yoking my

weakness to the removal of a mountain, spadeful by spadeful, a helpless and a hopeless labour. And nobody else can do anything with my sin. My friends can pity me, but their pity does not redeem. They can ease my outer circumstances, but the ease is not the mother of vital peace. The awful mountain remains, and it mocks the finest resources of human friendship. It is the biggest thing I know, and I stand before it as impotent as a broken reed. I am like the Psalmist, "My strength faileth because of my iniquity." But if the good Lord mercifully draws near to my sin, how then? Then my biggest thing is vanquished by something bigger, even by the wonderful grace of the Most High. "Where sin abounds, grace doth much more abound." It is like some parochial hillock set in the presence of the Himalayas. Nay, that comparison is ill suited to express the glorious might of the grace of God. I find a better comparison on some sandhill which children have been piling up on the shore throughout a long day; and God's great sea rolls in, wave upon wave, depth beyond depth, and in its majestic advance the hillock crumbles away, and is

levelled with the sandy plain. Where the hill abounded God's vast sea doth much more abound. Sin finds its master in grace. The big thing can be buried in the bigger thing. And Divine grace is the only bigger thing that can ever be found. But the grace is so wonderful and so abounding that our sin is lost in its infinite depths as an unclean thing can be dropped in mid-Atlantic and buried in the depths of the sea. God's grace does not just measure up to our sin, it rises above it in overmastering grandeur. We are more than conquerors.

And how is it with my common necessities—the care that pinches me, the sorrows that beset me, the lean circumstances which touch and chill me as with fingers of ice? How is it with human grief and pain? They are big things; the only bigger thing is sin. But these are big and far-stretching. They journey with man wherever man travels and wherever he dwells, whether it be among arctic snows or in the burning sun of the tropics. The gloom of sorrow is like the natural darkness, its circuit engirdles the globe. And where is the antidote of human suffering and sorrow? Who has the magic



touch which can wipe away bitter tears? Where is the physician with wines and cordials in his wallet which can remove the heavy stuff that weighs upon the heart? Where do our doctors of sorrows live, the skilled practitioners who can dispel heart-ache, and chase away the grief that saps the mind? Who deals in the secret virtue that is the master of sorrow? Who has the bigger thing?

Only Christ has the bigger thing. "Our consolations also abound in Christ." I love the fulness of the word "abound." Christ's consolations are not ministries which may or may not be equal to our griefs; they overtop them like great waters. Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal. There is no grief standing in insolent pride outside and beyond the consolations of grace. Our sorrows may abound, but Christ's consolations more abound. Thus it is that our sorrow is transfigured, and thus it is that "at midnight Paul and Silas, flogged and bleeding, sang praises unto God, and the prisoners heard them." Our Lord's ministries are always abounding. In His grace our cup always runneth over.



## XIV

### THE WAY INTO THE HOLIEST

“Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?  
and who shall stand in His holy place!”

PSALM xxiv. 3.

Behind the imagery of this psalm there is a soul seeking the presence of the Lord. He is turning to the climbing road which leads to the sacred floors, and he is seeking the holy place which is the home of the Lord. What, then, does he say are the appointed terms on which a pilgrim may find favour with the Lord of the way, and be prosperously admitted to all the rights of the road?

First of all there is rectitude of conduct. “*He that hath clean hands.*” Then there is to be no weaving of unclean webs. There is to be no dabbling in dirty enterprise. There is to be no fingering of evil devices. There is to be no toying with guile, or with any form of deceit. There is to be no raking with the

muck-rake if the hands are to be kept clean. There must be no signing of disloyal bonds and covenants. There must be no touching of pitch in all the countless touchings of the busy day. The hands are to be clean at the beginning of the day, and they are to be clean at its close. The man with clean hands may take the hill-road which leads to the holy place.

And the second condition is simplicity of motive. "*He that hath a pure heart.*" This is a very exacting demand. It passes from the hands to the heart. It goes inward from conduct to character, and from movement to motive. And the motive is to be simple, single, clean. There is to be no mixing of base alloy with the finer metal. It is to be pure gold. There is to be nothing about it of what St. James calls "the double soul"—one soul pandering with Mammon, and the other attempting dealings with God. The motive is to be simplex, not duplex. The required condition is singleness of heart. "Blessed are the pure in heart." Yes, that sort of pilgrim may take to the hill and find the holy place.

The third condition is loyalty of worship.

*“Who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity.”* Deeper and more exacting is the demand. What is this lifting up of the soul? It is the expression of worship, and the all-determining thing is—what do we worship? To what do we lift the eyes of our desire? Is it to the goddess of vanity? Or is it the goddess of transient fashion? Or is it the spirit of the age? Or is it the ideal of success? Or is it the goddess of pleasure and ease! To what do we lift our eyes in worship? *“Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up mine eyes.”* Yes, that man is entitled to all the rights of the aspiring road, and he may begin to climb the sacred hill.

And the last condition is truth in word. *“Who hath not sworn deceitfully.”* Does not that seem to be a relaxation of the terms after the other conditions that have been named? No, life blossoms at the lips. All the inner life hangs out its flags and banners in our words. We may infer the one from the other. If the word is crooked or perverse, we may be perfectly sure that the heart in which it was born is also deformed. Or, to change my figure, our words are just vessels carrying the inner life of the soul.

And, therefore the words can be sacred as cups which carry the sacramental wine, or they can be as cups that carry a poisonous draught. "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." When our words are full of truth and grace the heart is ready for communion with the King. Such a pilgrim can take to the rising road which leads to the holy place.

Well, these are the conditions as the psalmist sees them. But, oh, the burden of it all! I wonder if any folk fulfil the conditions, and if there are many such pilgrims on the road? And how do they do it? And how did this man do it? Did he really do it? He does not let us into his secret. He only gives us the dazzling light of a great ideal, and we may well be scared by it.

I shall choose another road, and it begins on the slopes of another hill. I have heard that the heights of Sinai can most surely be gained by beginning the journey at "a green hill" just "outside a city wall." In the Lord Jesus Christ I find a "living way" to the very secrets of rest and glory which the Psalmist craved. "I am the way." All the

conditions are fulfilled in Him. For He is not only the way, but the truth and the life. In Christ Jesus I can find freedom from that uncleanness which I can no more shed than I can shed my skin. And in Christ Jesus I am not only delivered from sin, I escape from weakness. In Christ Jesus I am not only on the road, I am right in the holy place. The wonder of wonders is this: Christ, who is my way, is also my home. "Thou, O Christ, art all I want."

## XV

### ASCENDING THE HILL OF THE LORD

“Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?  
and who shall stand in His holy place?”

PSALM xxiv. 3.

When Dante begins to make the real ascent to Paradise he has to mount three steps at the beginning of the journey. There is first a step of white marble. Then there is a step which is rough, broken and uneven. And, third, there is a step of flaming porphyry. The imagery is extraordinarily vivid, and the vividness is surely equalled by its truth. If we wish to ascend the hill of the Lord, these are the first three steps which set us on the road. Any other beginning will lead into a road which winds round the base of the hill and never turns upward to the summit.

We begin with the step of white marble. It is the symbol of purity and sincerity. It corresponds to the scriptural symbol of the white robe. The hill-pilgrim must be clean.

Outside every Moslem mosque there is provision made for every worshipper to wash his feet. I have seen hundreds of them engaged in this purifying ministry before they went into the holy place. But our own washings are not preparative for the hill of the Lord. For one thing, we do not know where the uncleanness is hiding, and, if we do, we should be unable to reach it. For instance, who can bring out his desires and rid them of every unworthy aspiration? Or, who can wash his affections as the Moslems wash their feet and rid them of every kind of defiling selfishness? Or who can take his conscience to pieces as he would clean a watch, and make it lucent as a diamond? The fact is, we cannot possibly take the first step to the white marble unless some mighty cleansing Minister will graciously make us clean. "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean!" Such is ever the cry of the pilgrim whose face is turned to the holy hill. "I will, be thou clean." Such is ever the swift response of the Saviour. "His blood can make the vilest clean. His blood avails for me."

From the white marble we pass to the

rough and broken step. It is the broken and contrite heart. Behind our word "contrite" there is the image of something crumbling like stubborn earth clods which are falling to pieces to receive the sun and God's refreshing dews and rains. And this is penitence. It is a very true and searching insight which prompts Dante to put the really vital penitence after the cleansing. The broken step comes after the white marble. It is only when we are forgiven that we really begin to see the deadly horribleness of sin. When we see sin over against grace it looks exceedingly sinful. It is the new light which makes us realise the terrors of the old night. It is when we come to know the Saviour that we find out how we have wounded Him. And then comes the penitence, the sorrow which is itself a minister of a consecrated life. We are on the second step, the rough and broken step, which takes us farther on the road to the paradise of God.

And then we reach the third step of the flaming red porphyry. And this is the kindling of love. It is the red glow of sacrificial affection. "We love Him because He first



loved us.” Yes, even our love is the child of His love, a little fire born of the central Sun. “She loved much because she was much forgiven.” Her heart opened to the Deliverer who had freed her, and He filled it with His own passionate flame. “God is Love,” and when a kindred love is blazing in our hearts we can make fine progress up the hill.

## XVI

### KEEPING AT ONE'S BEST

“On Thee do I wait all the day.”

PSALM xxv. 5.

What I am thinking about is this—that so many of us only wait on God for a very little while, and then we withdraw, and it is all over. Our waiting is a passing visit; it is not an abiding. We merely call upon the Lord; we do not live with Him. We go and we come away; we do not wait on Him all the day.

The trouble with many of us is found in this broken and fragmentary idea of the devotional life. We think of our devotions as a sort of discipline or gymnastics which we can pack into five or ten minutes. We do not regard them as a vital communion which runs right through the day. And so fellowship comes to be looked upon as a kind of morning drill. Not that I would disparage the morning drill, even in physical

exercises; but the morning drill is not worth much if it is followed by the careless indifference of a lounging attitude, or a shambling walk, or if we huddle up in our chairs in an almost hunchbacked deformity. And the morning devotion is worth just as little if it is regarded as something we can do and have done with, and carry no shaping devoutness into the rest of the day. We have not really entered into the secret place of the Most High if we can leave it behind. The only vital fellowship is that which waits on God "all the day."

Professor Gairdner used to say, "One never knows what work God may ask one to do at any moment, and one should always be at one's best." And surely that is only a paraphrase of the Master's counsel: "Have your loins girt and your lamps trimmed, and be ye ready." And if this spiritual readiness is to be yours it will demand a spiritual habit and not merely an occasional act. For it implies a way of living. It means that the soul keeps itself reverently posed towards the eternal with an alert readiness to know and to do the will of the Lord.

That is one of the shining distinctions of the angels of God: "They do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word." Their spirit is ever ready; they are alert and vigilant. They are receptive and appreciative, and their mood is constant. They serve Him day and night in His temple, and it is a service in which they never tire, and never grow old.

Yes, we should always be at our best, and the secret of being at one's best is found in waiting on God "all the day." We must seek continuity of communion. We need a Divine fellowship which remains unbroken even in seasons of merriment and in the hours when we earn our daily bread. Our God is a Companion for the whole journey. He will accompany us all the day and all the way.

## XVII

### FEARLESS BEFORE THE THREATENING HOST

“Though an host should encamp against me,  
my heart shall not fear.”

PSALM xxvii. 3.

It is a marvellous triumph of grace when we can stand before an advancing army of adverse circumstances and not be afraid. We have passed far into the secret place when the massed antagonists do not trouble us any more than a single foe. The fact of the matter is, we are very prone to be confounded by magnitude. Mere mass hypnotises us. We become the victims of its mesmeric fascination. We are distracted. We lose our balance. We see things out of their perspective, and in these matters disproportion is death. We ought to be able to keep a quiet eye when adverse armies bear down upon us. To see them in the larger relationships in which they shrink to a very slender line, to meet them confidently and unperturbed—this is a very clear token that

we are moving towards them with the magnificent accompaniment of grace. To fear nothing but God is the supreme triumph.

I am very fond of that strong, vigorous, invigorating sentence of John Milton which I long ago marked in his *Areopagitica*: "God intended to prove me, whether I durst take up alone a rightful cause against a world of disesteem and found I durst." I like Milton's interpretation of his antagonisms. He heard the divine challenge in their approach. "Durst thou, or wilt thou retreat?" And Milton's soul answered the challenge with all the sensitiveness and reticence with which a true soldier answers the call of the bugle. He first of all retired into the inner room of his own being, and he summoned all his moral and spiritual resources, and he went forth with fearless heart to meet his foes. "He found I durst!" And Milton's way is the great secret in all radiant triumphs. We must discern the divine Presence on the field of conflict. We must hear the divine challenge in our circumstances. We must see the divine test of our moral and spiritual worth. "Durst thou?" To accept our conditions

in this spirit is to face our antagonistic circumstances with a feeling of tonic instead of panic. We are nerved rather than enervated by the menace. "There are some men," says Emerson, "who rise refreshed on hearing a threat." They are the men who hear the divine bugle in the gathering gloom. To them the battle-ground is larger than the immediate field. Their company is greater than the threatening host. The encompassing mountains are filled with horses and chariots of fire, and in a sublime confidence they move forward to certain triumph. They lose no strength in traitorous fear. "Durst thou?" "By Thy grace I will."

So doth the Lord prove us in the dark and cloudy day. And so is our vigour unveiled in the tempests. We are made manifest by the very enemy who came to destroy us. "The things which happened unto me have turned out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel." The menace leads us more deeply into the treasures of grace. Our temptations unlock our resources. Our sorrows discover to us the consolations of the everlasting life. And, therefore, "though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear."

## XVIII

### RESOLUTION ARMED WITH PRAYER

“Wait on the Lord, and let thine heart take courage.”

PSALM xxvii. 14.

Mere courage may be very inefficient. It can be little more than high spirits, and subject to the swift changes of the surrounding temperatures. Courage may be only a chivalrous impulsiveness, a brilliantly attractive flare, but speedily relapsing into the cold greyness of the advancing night. There is the courage of the single act. There is the higher courage of prolonged action. There is the still higher courage of waiting, when the relief of action is forbidden. And therefore must we distinguish between the courage which is born and dies in a day, and that which stubbornly persists through the long, exacting years. One is flightiness, the other is fortitude.



Now the courage commended in the Christian Scriptures is an evergreen. It is not brave impulsiveness, but strong endurance. It is not the exhilarant spirits of a single battle, but the firm, resolute mood of a long campaign. It is not so much the impetuosity which can take Jericho by assault as the hardihood which can, if need be, tramp round it seven times, waiting for the crumbling of its walls. This kind of resoluteness must itself be armed, or circumstances will maim and destroy it. Courage can lose its blood, not only by disappointment and defeat, but by the lack of suitable food. The noblest courage must be armed by regular and appropriate sustenance.

Now prayer is the appointed means by which this highest kind of courage is fed. We are to "wait on the Lord," and our heart will "take courage." Through prayer our courage renews its youth like the eagle. The heart is invigorated into fresh ambition and endeavour. Its grip upon high ends is established, and it turns to the dull road with a new song. It is not so much that we acquire good spirits as that we obtain deepened communion with the renewing

Spirit of God. The praying soul is the dwelling-place of the Holy Ghost. Such a soul "shall not fear when heat cometh"; its resources shall be equal to the demands of the fiercest drought.

## XIX

### THE VICISSITUDES OF LIFE

“Thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds.”

PSALM xxxvi. 5.

And is there anything more fickle and changeable than the clouds? The transformation of their outline is continual. If we try to sketch a cloud, it is almost gone before our materials are ready. So fleeting is the form that we can watch the swift transition. And yet these ephemeral presences are here chosen to express the faithfulness of God. Clouds are not the creation of caprice. They are not shaped by chance temperature, or by lucky and unlucky winds and tempests. In all their fickleness there is an abiding purpose. In the apparent chaos there is an established throne. Every transformation obeys a sovereign rule. “His faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds.”

Life, too, is full of vicissitudes. Our circumstances are as changeable as the clouds.

Everything is in flux. We are never really "settled"; a radiant circumstance suddenly melts like a fleecy cloud, and another circumstance appears full of dark menace and frown. "Change and decay in all around I see." And yet the swift and almost fierce transitions are bound together by an invisible bond of divine faithfulness. They are more than a chain; they are the highway of grace. Through all the many coils and complications of an Alpine rope there runs the unbroken red strand which betokens its genuineness and strength. And through all the complicated web of the believer's circumstances, with their swiftly changing patterns, there runs the enduring strand of divine fidelity, the blood-red strand of sacrificial love and care.

And thus our changing lot is the home of the unchanging God. One purpose pervades the passing seasons. It links together spring-time and winter, and sunshine and shower. My fragmentary life may be a glorious whole in the unfailing truth and mercy of the eternal God. "O Thou who changeth not, abide with me."

## XX

### THE UNCREATED BEAM

“In Thy light shall we see light.”

PSALM xxxvi. 9.

A little while ago I was in a certain cathedral when the sunshine, pouring through a very vivid stained-glass window, fell upon the open Bible, and stained its pages with the colour of the medium through which it passed. It was no longer the simple sunshine, but tinted green or purple, as the case might be. And the happening became symbolic, and took on spiritual significance. For how often we filter God's plain light through coloured windows of our making. We construct a transforming medium, and then we affect to bask in the eternal Light, when all the time we are moving in perverted light of our own creation.

Perhaps it is the stained window of prejudice. A man may cultivate a prejudice until it becomes one of the firm and

established windows in his life. He sees everything in the purple rays of this medium. He sees his neighbour in this misinforming light. He looks at society and business as they lie in the self-created hue. Nay, the Bible itself reflects the light of his own prejudice, and he sees only what he wants to see, and not what the Holy Spirit revealed. If only he would remove that stained-glass window, and let God's sunshine stream through, then in God's light he would see light, and the revelations would be the ministers of truth and holiness.

Or perhaps the perverting medium is a mean or false ambition. Our ambitions directly influence our desires, and our desires are master-elements in determining our interpretation of God's truth. We may believe just as much as we want to believe, and that "want" is largely fashioned by the most zealous ambition which is reigning in the soul. It was on this matter that our Master uttered a very significant word:—"How can ye believe who seek honour one of another." Here is belief in one direction fatally affected by a search in another direction. That is to say, a man's faith is

directly related to his quest. A man who is feverish for honours, and who will take any road to get them, cannot believe in Jesus, for the simple reason that he cannot see Him. Everything is deeply coloured in the red hues of his own fiery ambition. He does not see anything as it really is, not even the Lord Himself. And except that man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God.

And so for the only wise and healthy life of the soul we need plain-glass windows. "If thine eye be single thy whole body shall be full of light." If we would enter into the wonderful secrets of salvation we must receive "with meekness" the engrafted word, and let it shine like unadulterated light upon all the powers and business of the soul. The revelation may be very startling. "Thou hast set our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance." But the exposure is only the first step to transformation, and, having loved the light, we shall most surely become children of light.

## XXI

### A CURE FOR FRETFULNESS

“Fret not thyself.”

PSALM xxxvii. 1.

If the counsel thus given to me were to end with these words it would form only another of the mocking voices which fill our heavy roads with ironical cheers. “Fret not!” Yes, but how? It is like telling one who is picking his way through the thick undergrowth of a dense wood to avoid the thorns. How can I do it? If the nettle-plant sprawls across my track, how am I to avoid being stung? How am I to get rid of fretfulness? How am I so to think about it as to destroy its strength? The trouble is that my very way of thinking may only add to its vigour. My attention may give it nourishment. It may feed on my very attempts to get rid of it. And, therefore, unless I am very careful, I may be its servant rather than its master, and while I am seeking my release new chains may be



thrown upon me. I may begin to fret about my fretfulness and thus intensify its tyranny. I am therefore looking for counsel which will probe to the very secret of my servitude and lead me to complete deliverance.

So much of the counsel which I hear only trifles with my bondage. For instance, there is what is called "the smile cure." I am advised to face my fretfulness with a smile! I am to light an artificial fire, a sort of stage fire, and in these artificial flames my frets are to be consumed! I am just to smile upon them and they will shrivel like moths in a candle. Yes, but there is nothing so exhausting as artificial smiling. The Lord Mayor of a great city told me that the most tiring function in his term of office was the continual smiling upon the almost endless procession of guests at one of his great civic receptions. It is the travail of a forced emotion. Nay, it is worse than that—it is the exactingness of an apparent emotion. The features had to be constrained into a smile when the smile had died out of the heart. That was the burden of it. And this suggested duel of smiling

versus fretting—I am afraid of the struggle. I shall some day labour in smiling when the frets are like young, lusty athletes, and I shall be sorely beaten; my defeat will be added to my troubles, and I shall fret all the more. This sort of counsel, and there is a great deal of it about, only trifles with my bondage.

If fretfulness is like a weed in a garden it is altogether needful to remember that it is a weed with a fearfully long root. It is not like some weed which runs lightly over the garden, and which you can easily pull out with your finger and thumb. There are weeds in a garden which are like travelling Bedouin; they only take light settlement anywhere. They pitch their tents upon the surface, and they never penetrate to any depth. There are other weeds which are like the dwellers and builders in great cities; they seek their foundations at great depths. I have known this type of weed, this settling, settled type, have a length of root which runs right under a garden bed, and the whole bed has to be overturned before you could eradicate it. And fretfulness is just like that. It is a tough, strongly-

rooted thing, and it goes very much deeper than you would believe.

And so deep treatment is required if it is to be expelled. The remedy must be something really radical, something which will explore its entire length and circuit, and so fetch it clean out of the soul. The trouble about these long-rooted things in the garden is this—that if you leave one little bit of root in the ground you are in for another progeny. And a bit of fretfulness left buried in the soul will strengthen and multiply itself until we have all the old trouble over again. And so the treatment must be fundamental, something which will reach the last fibrous thread at the end of the long root, and leave everything sweet and clean.

Well, that is the glory of the counsel in the thirty-seventh Psalm. The remedy is deeper than my necessity, for it is as deep as God. How does the counsel begin? “*Trust in the Lord* and do good.” I am to fling myself upon the trustfulness of God. God’s grace and fidelity are to be as green pastures, and I am to lie down in them. They are to be as “waters of quietness,” and I am to go right up to them and drink.

I am to do it of set purpose, consciously, deliberately, by an act of faith and hallowed imagination. And while I am in the green pastures I shall hear of "ways of righteousness," where the trusty, trustful knights of God can go and render knightly service. They can "do good." And the wonderful thing is this, that when a knight takes to the chivalrous crusade he takes the green pastures and the quiet waters with him. These knights are at rest even while they serve.

Every part of this counsel leads my necessity to the deeper things of God. "*Delight thyself in the Lord*": we are to carry our devotion into such deep inwardness that we reach the springs of joy. "*Commit thy way unto the Lord.*" The mile as well as the inch, the inch as well as the mile! The next step as well as "the distant scene," the bit of road that is far away, and the stretch that is quite near. The entire way—commit to thy Friend, Great-heart, who is the Lord of the way, and who knows it from end to end. "*Rest in the Lord.*" Yes, indeed, and that will surely follow. The once harassed heart will be at rest, and fretfulness will be dead.

## XXII

### HOW FIRES ARE KINDLED

“While I was musing the fire burned.”

PSALM xxxix. 3.

This is how every sort of spiritual fire is kindled. If I may so put it, fusing comes by musing. It may be a clean fire, pure and brilliant as a flame of oxygen. Or it may be a dirty fire, like one which blackens a whole landscape and throws a pall over a hundred homes. Whether it be one or the other the kindling comes of musing. We think about things and fires are lit. It is as though the mysterious friction in the exercise and process of the mind creates a spark, and inflammatory things catch fire. Thought is creative of mood. Thinking generates feeling. As soon as thought becomes active, tempers begin to stir in their sleep, and they get out of their beds in vigorous life. We simply cannot help it. It is the ordered succession in the constitution of things. This

is how the heats of life are born, whether they be perilous heats, pregnant with destruction, or genial heats, as friendly as is the spring sunshine to the sleeping wealth of the garden.

What sort of fire is this which the Psalmist has been kindling? Some stroke has fallen upon him, and his life is impoverished. We have no details of his calamity to guide our imagination. Perhaps his strength has been smitten, and whereas he has hitherto grasped his tasks with the grip of an athlete he now handles them with the feeble touch of an invalid. Perhaps some fair family union has been shattered by the rude and sudden entry of death. At any rate, whatever it be, the harmony of his life has been broken, and everything is in confusion.

He makes up his distressed mind about one thing. He will control his spirit. He will not break loose into blasphemy. And, especially, he will not utter faithless words when the wicked are before him. He will not give them the opportunity for impious laughter. He will not fill his ways with loud murmurings and complaints. Such were the

vows he made to himself concerning his speech. But while he sought to control his words he did not put the same leash upon his thoughts. While he did little speaking he did much thinking. He nursed his deprivation. He dwelt upon it. His thought played round about it until the deprivation began to assume the form of a wrong. His affliction stood up before him as an outrage. He mused and mused over it, and his thought was both spark and fuel to his moods. And at length, in spite of his vows, the fire broke out like volcanic flames from central depths. He filled the air with repining. His roads were strident with his complaints. No matter who or what was his audience he let himself go. Let any one read the whole of the psalm, and then turn from its feverish heat to the cool and noble equanimity of the last chapter of Habakkuk, and he will be fully conscious what sort of fire can be set a-blazing when a man's thought is moodily concentrated upon his afflictions. Concentrated thought is like sunshine gathered and focussed through a lens—the heat sets things on fire. “As I mused the fire burned.”



But, as I say, every fire is kindled in this way. It is even so with the fire of disastrous ambition. You can study the process in the development of the character of Brutus in "Julius Cæsar." You can watch the fire as it kindles. A friendly conspiracy directs his musings. Hints and suggestions are given which lead his thoughts to the imperial crown. Bits of paper are thrown into his chamber window, with single sentences written on them which are full of incitement to his spirit. There are faint or clear instigations in his intercourse with his friends, and they subtly turn his thoughts to Cæsar's place and Cæsar's crown. And as he muses the fire burns, and a devouring ambition begins to blaze across his being, which transforms all his faculties into the medium of attainment.

It is equally true of the fire of jealousy. Thinking leads to burning. Direct the thought in a certain direction, and let it dwell there, let it peer about in suspecting vigilance and you will soon have a fire. But these are all gloomy and deadly applications of the law. There are bright and positive aspects of it. For instance, it is in this way



that the fire of hope is kindled. It is by a certain style of thinking that we generate the hopeful mood. If we firmly set ourselves to be as those who watch for the morning, intensely gazing for signs of coming day, optimistic feelings will begin to burn in our hearts even before the rising sun has tipped the hills with gold. Let any one read his daily paper with the one purpose of searching for signs of goodness, for the unveiling of truth, for acts of justice, for deeds of mercy, for movements of philanthropy—let him do it for a month, seeking as for hidden treasure, and he will be amazed at his findings. And while his thought is at work his feelings are stirring, his fire is burning, the cold ashes of pessimism begin to glow in cheery and radiant hope. As he muses the fire burns.

## XXIII

### GIVING A MAN A NEW START

“He hath set my feet upon a rock, and hath established my goings.”

PSALM xl. 2.

This is a fragment of a song, and it must be interpreted from the mood of jubilation. The man is singing, and he has much to make him sing. He has come out of awful horrors where he has been imprisoned, but he is now in the sunny light of freedom, and he has got a new start on a new road. And he is singing as he strides along. What contrast of experience has there been which has thus changed the life from dismal threnody into brightest song? Let us listen to him.

First of all, then, he tells us that God has taken him out of “a horrible pit.” He has been in dire and dreadful captivity. We can read his story through our own experiences. There was a moment when his life took to downward courses. His inclinations

turned away from the heights. He left the Alpine regions of purity and truth, and he began to tread the way of moral decline. At first, perhaps, his steps were slow and hesitant, then they became more swift and confident. He descended from stage to stage in the deepening plains of the immoral gradient. He began to think some things quite easily which at first used to encounter resistance. He conceived evil purposes with composure. He had an increasing delight in evil things. His palate adjusted itself to new conditions, and the old sweet things now tasted bitter, and the old bitter things now tasted sweet.

Then the internal degeneracy began to reveal itself in external signs. His very face began to tell the story. Men looked into his face with something like shudder and fear. The lines of his countenance became the literature of ruin, and outsiders were able to read the writing. His flesh began to speak of disaster. There were growing signs of riot and disorder. There was a physical defacement which meant that the angel was being smothered and that a carnal tyranny was taking its place. Indeed, it was becom-

ing clear that the man had left the spiritual end of his consciousness, where he used to live, and he was now making his home at the carnal end, and the home became ever more and more his dungeon. Such was the range of his fall! Such was "the horrible pit."

But there was even worse than this. He had deliberately gone into the horrible pit, but he could not get out again. In the pit there was "miry clay." The dirtiness not merely beset him, it clave unto him. His degeneracy became his servitude. He had used his freedom to become a slave. He was like a bird whose wings are coated with bird-lime; the more the bird flutters the more complete is its captivity; the more it struggles to be free the more it is bound. This man was in "the miry clay," and his powers were enslaved. His guilt and his sins clung to him, and they held him fast. He could have cried with another victim, and perhaps he did—"My strength faileth because of my iniquity." He was in a horrible pit, and in miry clay, and he could not get out.

But now in his helplessness he lifts his soul to God in fervent pleading. He calls

aloud to the great Companion, the Friend who never upbraids us, however late we may knock at His door. It may be at the eleventh hour that we knock at His door, but He never meets us with mockery, or with irony, or with any taunting suggestion that we had better go back to the friends with whom we have spent the other ten. This man called unto the Lord in all his filthy helplessness. In the miry clay he made his prayer. And a Hand appeared! Nay, a Presence appeared, and he was lifted clean out of the clinging mire and right out of the horrible pit. The lifting grace was the same power which called the dead out of their graves, and which worked in Jesus in the power of His resurrection. This man, in God's wonderful mercy, escaped from the miry clay, and he left the pit behind. His soul escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler.

“He set my feet upon a rock!” This is the contrast between a wet, horrible dungeon and an open road, between the engulfing mire and the firm, unyielding rock. The gracious Lord lifts him on to *terra firma*, giving him a splendid footing and a confi-

dent foothold. "And He hath established my goings!" On the new, firm, radiant road He set him going, giving him a new start in life, leaving all his enslavement behind him like a past nightmare of horrible dreams. It was a new road and a new start.

And what more is there? "And He hath put a new song in my mouth." What a superlative ministry of divine grace! God always makes our cups to run over. He not only gave the bird its freedom, He restored its song; nay, He awakened chords that had never been heard before. This liberated captive takes to the new road with a song. Soldiers know what it means to sing on the march. Music gets into the feet, and it transforms a heavy crawl into a jubilant dance. This was the mercy of the Lord—He added music to freedom.

## XXIV

### THE WITNESS OF THE NEW LIFE

“He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God.”

PSALM xl. 2, 3.

Is it possible to arrange a series of metaphors more expressive of a life which has been turned by the Lord from the sin and misery of spiritual alienation into the buoyancy and glory of spiritual freedom? The figures of speech just race after one another in breathless eagerness to describe the wonders of deliverance. Picture follows picture, and every new one adds a new element of wonder. The victim was in a horrible pit, the deep home of a peopled darkness, full of all sorts of ugly and frightful shapes. Then the pit had the added horror of miry clay. The victim was sinking into more awful necessity; he had no firm

standing. And the Lord lifted him clean out of this gruesome bondage. He found himself in the light with a steadfast sense of assurance that he had gained a new standing. From miry clay to rock! But the delivered life was not stationary. It was full of movement and progress. The Lord gave him power to step out on a new road. "He established my goings." And as if the emancipation was not even yet sufficiently bountiful, the new road became the home of music. "He put a new song in my mouth." Shall we say that this restored clock has musical chimes? This released bird has found a new song? This song has made the splendid exchange of mourning for the oil of joy, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

But I have not yet disclosed what I wish to be most prominent in this meditation. After describing his deliverance the Psalmist goes on to say: "Many shall see, and shall fear, and shall trust in the Lord." He was once a bondsman and he has become a noble Crusader, and he goes singing along his way. You cannot hide that man. He must be heard and seen. He need not have



a pulpit and be a preacher or a public herald. His witness is of a more vital order, for it is the arresting witness of a transformed and transfigured life. This is not a miracle which is read about; this is a miracle which is walking about, and very ordinary folk can see it and be impressed by its significance. The miry clay has been left behind. The pit is now a gloomy memory. The man is a Knight of the Lord, and as he strides along in clean, shining armour, and with a heart that is full of praise, others are quickened by the vital witness, the minds of men are turned to nobler things, and they begin to fear and trust in the Lord.

It is this kind of witness which is the herald of larger triumphs. "They came that they might see Lazarus whom He had raised from the dead." They came in curiosity; they stayed in reverence; they knelt in surrender and prayer. The miracle that happened to one Knight drew others into the fellowship of Christ.

## XXV

### THE NUCLEUS OF EVIL CHARACTER

“His heart gathereth iniquity to itself.”

PSALM xli 6.

The way to gather a huge snowball is to make a little one, and then roll it along, and it gains bulk and strength as it is rolled. It makes increase in its goings. The way to leaven a bowl of meal is to begin with a bit of leaven, and it will do all the rest. The momentous thing is to have a nucleus, and the nucleus will gather things which are congenial to its own nature. Like unto like—that is the law of life. Begin with a little, and the little organises its own increase. It gathers its kindred unto itself.

And all this is true of sin. One particular mode of sin can be a nucleus round which gathers a sinful life. It draws to itself strength and increase, and its putrid presence sends tainted influence into all

life's concerns. A little corruption in a kitchen can touch all the food with defilement. One vice can pollute a soul. It is very significant that in Dante's *Inferno* each soul is punished for one type of sin. Some are punished for avarice, some for gluttony, some for envy, some for hatred. One particular sin has ascendancy, and it meets with a corresponding judgment. But Dante does not teach that a particular sin can stand aloof in the life, like some poisonous weed in an otherwise lovely garden. Dante teaches, as much as any man, that solitary sins do not run through life like single lines of thread. Indeed, life is never a matter of separated lines, like railway lines, which run side by side and never meet. Life is a most intimate and complicated web, and its interwoven meshes are more closely related than anything we can conceive. No man can be avaricious and have only a single thread of defilement running through his soul. His avarice will be creative of other vices; it will call them, and enlist them in its service, as surely as a cesspool calls the wandering flies and sends them to carry its plague over wider fields. A glutton is not

a man of a single vice, like a country that has only a single hill towering above the plain. There will be other peaks of vice, and together they will constitute a mountain range of viciousness. And these other heights will be gathered around the central height of gluttony and will lean on it like lesser hills upon the central strength.

That is surely Dante's meaning. The single sin is the organising nucleus, and it gathers to itself a kindred character. No man ever rests contented with a single sin; the sin becomes a host, and yet the predominant sin is the destructive presence by which the soul is ultimately poisoned and destroyed. "Sin gathers iniquity unto itself."

Therefore it is the high wisdom of life to search out and destroy the tolerated vice. Make a lynx-eyed search for the bit of tainted meat in the larder. Have no mercy on the putrid nucleus which in itself may seem comparatively harmless. "Make no provision for the flesh." That is to say, do not leave anything hanging about in the life in which a carnal character can find a feast.

Be intolerant of every evil which will feed and fatten other evils. Root out the seemingly single vice and you will destroy an entire brood. Root out the bitter weed and you sweeten the whole bed.

## XXVI

### VICTORY BY FLIGHT AND BY FIGHT

“God is our refuge and strength.”

PSALM xlv. 1.

These words always seem to me to make a two-fold offer of victory, and there is abundant power in the promise to make our security complete. How does this revelation of grace meet our necessity? Well, on the one hand, the wayfarer on the road of life is often faced by perils when his only safety is found in flight. It is not the armour he needs but a refuge. He gains his victory by putting a distance between himself and the foe. He wins his triumph by running away, and by running as far and as swift as he can. A refuge is a crying necessity, and he finds it in God. “God is our refuge.” On the other hand, there are enemies who can be best conquered by direct attack. Our safety is found in fighting, and in fighting with all our powers. Forward in frontal attack. That is the way of victory. And

for such strenuous battle the warfarer needs inner resource and dynamic. He needs spiritual vigour and fitting equipment. It is not a refuge he requires, but strength. And his necessity is fully and gloriously filled up in God. "God is our strength." And therefore do I call the Psalmist's word a two-fold offer of victory. God is near when our spiritual security is gained by flight; He is our refuge. And God is near when our spiritual security is gained by fight; He is our strength.

Let us look a little more closely at these treasures of grace. Sometimes our finest victories are found in triumphant retreat. We win, not by engaging the enemy, but by running away. But the retreat must be a masterly retreat, masterly and masterful in the way in which we make a menacing circumstance pay homage to our Lord. What sort of enemies are they which are thus beaten by leaving them alone? We shall be wise to consult a great warrior, who is very intimate with our road and very expert in spiritual battles and campaigns. I mean the Apostle Paul. We can scarcely associate the thought of retreat with so valiant

a fighter, and yet this famous soldier of the faith frequently counsels flight as the best way of gaining victory. For instance, here is one counsel, "Flee from idolatry." Do not go near it. Fly away from it. It is an enemy with a most subtle contagion, and even in fighting it we may be stricken with the plague. A false homage may cunningly steal into our worship and our fine loyalty may be broken. "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." We fight by flight.

And here is another counsel of the great warrior, "Flee youthful lusts." Put the width of a world between you and them. We reveal our strength in our apparent weakness; we conquer by running away. It is a false display of valour and of power when we say to ourselves, "I am not afraid of these dragons; I will go right up to them and I will drive them away as though they were sheep! Dragons, are they? I will chase them as though they were kittens!" Along that road lies defeat. The way to beat them is to run away. Evil desire pines when we treat it with negligence. It starves in contempt. Give it a wide berth. Flee to your refuge!



And yet sometimes our security is gained by fight. Turn to that great fighter, John Bunyan, and accompany him along the road, and watch his pilgrim as he advances in frontal attack to face and fight the foe. Watch him as he meets Apollyon as the antagonist straddles across the road, and take note how by the Word, and by the expert use of a weapon called All-Prayer, he puts Apollyon to flight. And watch Mr. Greatheart as he routs and slays Giant Despair. It is as good a bit of fighting as I know. He advances with a brave army of promises, and he invades the castle of the grim old giant, and he speedily makes an end of him. We must not leave our doubts to thrive and fatten; we must slay them by the word of His grace.

And so God is a very present help for flight and for fight. He meets us in every emergency, and our victory may be continuous and complete.

## XXVII

### THE STILLNESS OF GREAT RELATIONSHIPS

“Be still, and know that I am God.”

PSALM xlv. 10.

I think it is permitted us to reverse the order of the Psalmist's words, and we shall gain an additional aspect of the inspiring truth. When we know that He is God we shall most certainly be still, and we shall find quietness in mind and heart. The consciousness of a vast relationship is the very secret of a noble and fruitful stillness. I remember walking across the intervening mile between Loch Lomond and Loch Long. Loch Lomond is an inland lake, and when I left it its waters were disquieted and boisterous, lashing the shores with angry waves. Loch Long is an arm of the sea, and its waters were perfectly calm, and I could look through its lucid depths and see the seaweed rooted on the rocks beneath. And the life of the soul, when it is like a

small, measurable lake, is easily disquieted, and little disturbances toss it into convulsions. But when the soul knows God, when it recognises its vast relationships, when it feels the tidal flow of the infinite within the waters of the breast, it has the secret of a great calm, and the little things leave it undisturbed. When the soul knows God it can be still.

We can move quietly among our common sorrows when we have the royal consciousness of relationship to God. For one thing, when we know God, the sorrow assumes another size, and takes on another colour. We sorrow, but not as those who have no hope. The soul has a great vista, and we do our thinking in royal areas, and we are not imprisoned in the immediate chamber. A sorrow looks one thing when it is set in the inch: it looks quite different when it is set in the infinite. The soul is quieted in the controlling sense of a vast relationship.

And once more it is the man with the big consciousness who can quietly set about the humblest tasks. We sometimes say that little men can do the little things. Perhaps we ought not to be so sure about it. Perhaps

it requires royal greatness to do little things as though they were great things. We read of some little men who would not wash one another's feet. "And Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God: He laid aside His garments, and took a towel, and girded Himself," and began to wash the disciples' feet. But mark that marvellous consciousness. "Jesus knowing . . . took a towel!" The little men were not great enough to do it. They were all disturbed and feverish in small, personal ambitions. Not one of the dwarfs would kneel to the service. If they had known the Lord, their souls would have been quieted and ready for any ministry. "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength." And this quietness is born of a sacred knowledge of the Lord. "This is life, to know Thee."

## XXVIII

### THE SHIELDS OF THE SOUL

“The shields of the earth belong unto God.”

PSALM xlvii. 9.

All fine protectives are the gifts of God. All that is spiritually defensive and sanative is the bounty of His grace. He holds in His hand everything that preserves the inner life from the invasion of disease, and keeps it strong, and sweet, and healthy. All the shields are His; and everything that is in any way a shield of the soul can be found in His great armoury. We need not inquire elsewhere for the shields, nor need we seek elsewhere, for all such journeys will fail of their quest. Whatever shield we are lacking we can find in God. The armoury is not on the other side of the world: it is nearer than the doors of our own home.

Take, for instance, that very fine shield which we call “good spirits.” That is a splendid shield for the soul, and it is a rare

protective when circumstances are gloomy, and many are inclined to be morbid, and all sorts of deadly germs are in the air. Men and women travel round the world in search of good spirits. They visit lively health-resorts in hope that some spark of gaiety may kindle a cheery fire in their own souls. They visit countries where they hope the very novelty of their surroundings may stir the spirits into bright and happy expectation. They set out to find good spirits in travel. And often the journey is a very pathetic failure, and the weary pilgrim returns home under the weight of a heavier depression. Let him try a shorter journey. Let him inquire for the shield in the armoury of God. Good spirits are the gift of the Spirit, and in the energies of the Spirit we are defended against the pestilence that walketh in darkness. "The joy of the Lord is your strength."

Or take the famous shield of love. There is none like it! "Love endureth all things." Nothing can break through the shield of love, and destroy the life that shelters behind it. The soul that wears this shield is gloriously immune. Where can we get the

shield? What ethical store can provide it? What humanitarian cult can supply it? What do they hand across the counter when we ask for this defence? What society is there in the city which promises to brace and defend the soul with the shield of love? Every door at which we knock mocks our askings, and we turn empty away. Love is one of the shields of the Lord, and it is waiting for us as one of the gifts of His grace. "The fruit of the Spirit is love."

And so it is with every shield that can protect the soul. They all belong unto God. We cannot buy them. We cannot have them as the prizes of long travels. They are in God's hands, and we must take them from Him. "But first," said they, "let us go into the armoury. So they did: and when he came there they harnessed him from head to foot with what was of proof lest perhaps he should meet with assaults in the way. He being therefore thus accoutred, walked out with his friends to the gate."

## XXIX

### GOD'S SHIELDS

“The shields of the earth belong unto God.”

PSALM xlvii. 9.

And God supplies these shields to His children. The shields are in His armoury, and they are at the disposal of any soul which sends forth a prayerful cry of need. There are subtle enemies on the road. They lie in ambush. They take us unawares. They are especially vigilant in the season when we are most easily attacked. They watch for the unguarded moments when we stand at ease. They follow us into the times when we are on furlough, when we have laid aside some defensive duty, or when we have left the sanative ministry of common toil. And they are maliciously watchful in those days when the air is soft, and genial, and balmy, and there is nothing to remind us that any hostile presence may ever lurk



beside our road. And so we have constant need of the shields of God.

And here is one of them—a healthy sense of the hideousness of sin. That is one of the greatest shields of the soul. Cardinal Newman wrote, in one of his devotional letters, “It is a great security against sin to be shocked at it.” The body finds a protective in its repulsion from putrid and nauseous food. Our moral recoils are splendid securities. The patriarch Job laid his hand on one of his defences when he said, “Cannot my palate discern perverse things?” So long as the palate retains this power of discrimination, and loathes the unclean, its very loathing is part of the armament which will safeguard it along the foulest road. Our moral repulsion is one of the shields of God.

And here is another—a healthy sense of the beauty of holiness. This sense is a correlative of the former. They may even be regarded as the two sides of the same shield. It is our likes which determine our dislikes. Our attractions always suggest our repulsions. It is a mighty defence for the soul to have a passionate love of the lovely,

to go along the road eager for every sign of the King's Presence, and to love His appearing. There is a very significant line in the portrayal of the character of Barnabas, which tells us that "when he saw the grace of God he was glad." When our emotions kindle at the sight of the things of grace we have a piece of splendid armour. It is one of the shields of God.

And here is a third—the assurance that God loves us. What a defence is that on the road! It gives birth to songs in the night! And then our very songs add still more to our defences. "Thou hast compassed me about with songs of deliverance." "The joy of the Lord shall be your strength." All these are typical shields, and we are not left to construct them in the dim light of our own ignorance. These shields belong unto God, and they are the gifts of His grace.

## XXX

### SONGLESS BIRDS

“Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation.”

PSALM li. 12.

There is a most arresting difference between a singing bird and a bird which has no song. Even fine feathers offer no adequate compensation for the absence of song. I have sat in a wood which was thronged with semi-tropical birds in gayest attire, and it seemed like Westminster Abbey at other times than the hours of worship, when it is crowded with moving visitors but the organ and choir are silent and there is no sound of praise. A wood with a singing thrush in it, or a robin, or a nightingale, is transformed. The gloomy twilight becomes a dim, religious light, and the wood becomes a temple. A bird with very plain feathers is a very fascinating creature if it is endowed with exquisite song. Yes, song is very captivating. I have known

a country road thronged with people after darkness had fallen, and they had gathered to hear a nightingale sing.

And all this leads me up to a very challenging word about religion. Does not the religious life become fascinating only when it has found a song? Does not piety become arresting only as it breaks into praise? Does not spiritual devotion become alluring only when duty is changed into love and harsh obedience ripens into joy? If religion has no joy it has no vital contagion. If it has no joy it has no glow in its own heart, and it lacks the power to kindle fire in others. A joyless religion is like a dripping wood, with a drenched bird or two on its branches, but with no quickening song at the heart of it.

And such was the plight of this Psalmist. He had lost his song. He had lost the joy of the divine communion. The fire of devotion had somehow smouldered, and everything was dull and gloomy. When he sought the Lord there was nothing of the lover's thrill in his going, but rather the mood of a slave turning again to his monotonous task. He went moodily. There was no eager

sprightliness in his steps, because there was no joy in his heart. His prayers were devoid of praise. His petitions did not rise like a lark to the accompaniment of "melody divine." Somehow he had lost his song, and all his ways were heavy.

It had not been always so. In other days his joy in God had set his steps to music. "I will sing of mercy and of judgment!" "I will sing aloud of Thy righteousness!" "I will sing praises unto the Lord!" "O come, let us sing unto the Lord a new song!" He had known what it was to crowd God's gates with thankful praise. He would begin the day with singing. "My voice shalt Thou hear in the morning, O Lord." And snatches of song mingled with all the labour and interests of the day. Ay, even God's statutes had become his songs in the house of his pilgrimage.

How had he lost his song? Who knows how songs are lost? Perhaps by sheer thoughtlessness. Perhaps by neglect. More likely by sin. Joy and sin can never be in concord. When we are in ways of sin we may manufacture something which looks like joy, but it is not the real thing; it is

only galvanised, it is not vital. It is not the joy of the Lord. We cannot keep the bird-note when our purity is lost. Joy flees away in fear when a loathsome thing comes into the soul.

And so this man turns to the Lord for the purity he had lost, that in recovered purity he might find the lost joy. "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." That is the first step to the restoration of joy. First the lost health and then the lost song. The chords will vibrate again when they have been cleansed and refined by God's holy grace. And where else can we turn for cleansing but to the Fountain of holiness? And we do not turn in vain. The way to the Fountain is cheery with words of promise: "They shall return, and come with singing!" "They shall rejoice even with joy and singing; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." When the Lord has taken from our souls everything that defileth, we are a new creation—"Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, and the time of the singing of birds is come!"

## XXXI

### TWO WAYS OF SEEKING REST

“Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.”

PSALM lv. 6.

“Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee.”

PSALM lv. 22.

It is surprising that these two sentences are found within the same psalm. They are so unlike each other as to be uncongenial and contradictory. One speaks of seeking rest by flying away; the other speaks of seeking rest by laying his burden upon God. One method is by flight; the other method is by trust. And these two strangely different things are found within the borders of a single psalm.

There are many other psalms where the changes of thought, and purpose, and emotion are just as revolutionary. Indeed the change is so startling in one or two of the psalms that the transition is considered by

some scholars to be forced and unnatural, and they suggest the possibility that perhaps two very dissimilar psalms have somehow been joined together. One was born in the merry month of May, the other was born in a sunless winter month, and somehow or other they have been forced into very unnatural wedlock. But I do not think we need invite an assumption of this kind. Soul-movement is often extraordinarily swift when we get into the presence of God, and these psalms are the audible expression of men who are engaged in divine communion. These men are closeted with the Lord, and it often happens that fellowship which begins in weariness and tears passes quickly into a strangely bright and buoyant joy, like the coming of a blue sky after a heavy thunderstorm, when the flowers re-open again and the birds begin to sing. And so I do not think that the swift transition is unnatural. When the Psalmist entered into communion with the Lord he felt like running away from his appointed task. "O that I had wings like a dove, then would I fly away!" Before he had been long in communion with God, his soul was resting,



though in the midst of convulsive circumstance, for he had cast his burden on the Lord.

Flight is never a remedy either for spiritual unrest or spiritual fatigue. We simply cannot run away from our deepest troubles. If we could run away from them it would be true that the gift of God can be bought with money. All that we should need to do would be to put down our money, book our passage, fly to another clime, and the thing is done, and the release is won. No, it simply cannot be done. We can run away from our tasks, but the way of desertion never leads to the fair and sunny realm of peace. "Then would I fly away and be at rest!" Oh, no, he would not be at rest; rest can never be found along that road. Restfulness, by which I mean serenity of mind, the deep assurance of union with the ultimate things of life, does not dwell in any place where the deserter makes his home. The deserter's land is full of ironical and satirical presences, and they fill his ways with mocking laughter.

We may fly away from our tasks as Jonah did when he turned his back upon Nineveh

and made his way to Tarshish. Jonah said to himself, "I will fly away and be at rest." But he found no rest. The stormy seas which he encountered were only the symbol of his own restless and tumultuous life. The task which had been laid upon him was indeed a hard task, and a man might pardonably shrink from the burden. But he should have engaged the will, which he used in flight, in casting his burden upon the Lord, and the Lord who had commanded the task would have borne the load.

Sometimes we try to fly away from our troubles. "I will just go off to California for a few months!" "I will get away to the South of France for a winter!" California and South of France have treasures of sweetness and sunshine, but they are not necessarily the home of God's peace. The ironical sorrow sits on the shoulders of the traveller and goes with him every inch of the way, and in the sunnier clime it throws its disturbing shadow over everything.

This Psalmist wished for wings that he might fly away. There is another man mentioned in the scriptures, who rested in the Lord and found wings. And this was

his testimony. "They that wait upon the Lord shall mount up with wings as eagles." But these wings are not for the flight of desertion, they are for the strong and swift ministries of service. "With twain they did fly," but they flew in the way of their appointed task, and they finished the work which God gave them to do.

## XXXII

### THE SOUL'S CONFIDENCE IN GOD

“In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid.”

PSALM lvi. 11.

The lusty confidence which is revealed in these words of the Psalmist is vitally different from many of the confidences in which men trust to-day. The first is spiritual, and is born of communion with a Person; the second is magical, and rests its confidence in things. The scriptural emphasis has unfailingly this distinction, that a Presence is unveiled in whom the soul can rest. We are not dealing merely with laws of life which it is our welfare to heed and our destruction to ignore. The confidence reaches behind and beyond the laws, and it seeks the One whose thought and purpose find expression in them. The men and women whom we meet in the Bible, those who are facing unknown and menacing circumstances without fear, are not trusting in

the friendliness of some vague and mysterious force. They do not find serenity and comfort in a constitution of the universe which wraps them about like some ubiquitous ether. Their trust is something far more immediate and intimate. It is not something which springs out of a sense of being in harmonious relations with the universal order. All these may be secretly implied in vital trust; but while vastly important, they are still secondary, and they are all easily attainable if something higher is secured.

These Biblical men and women lived in a fellowship, they enjoyed a Companionship. They did not rest in New Thought, but in a creative and ever-renewing union with One who was only slightly veiled, and with whom they could live in unbroken commerce and correspondence. They could walk and talk with Him. The relationship was not cold and mechanical, something that finds analogy in electric energy, and in suitable switches and wires. There was life in it and feeling; there was desire in it and affection; there was joy and tears. The Secret in which they trusted was not hidden under a

neuter pronoun, like so many of the secrets of our modern cults and practices. They did not speak of "it," but of "him." "The Lord Himself is thy keeper." When they went out to their daily work, or when they returned from their work at the fall of day, it was "the Lord" who was to guard both their goings out and their comings in. When in weariness of body they laid them down to sleep, it was "Thou only who makest me to dwell in safety." When they opened their eyes in the morning, "When I awake I am still with Thee." The companioning Presence was "warm, sweet, tender," and they found His gracious tokens all along their way. It is the living Person who is the secret of their peace. "In the Lord put I my trust." "Believe in God; believe also in Me."

We can now name some of the things which can always be found in a quiet attitude of vital trust. First of all, there is always *an assurance of spiritual fellowship*. We are not crying to a far-off Presence. There is no caprice in His moods and journeyings. We always know how we shall find Him, and we always find Him so. He does not

lure us and then mock us. His enticements are always satisfying, for His promises are always redeemed. And therefore we may have perfect assurance in His fellowship. To recall the phrase, both the Old Testament and the New speak of "walking" with God. It is a most companionable phrase. It does not take us among the austerities of a throne-room, we are not left in the repressing sobrieties of the Holy Place; we are out on our own road, the familiar way which leads to our daily work, or perhaps the unfamiliar way which leads to a newly-made grave. And our Lord "walks" with us. He keeps pace with us when sorrow makes our steps slow and heavy, or when happiness almost adds wings to our feet. He walks with us! We shall not degrade the wonderful word if we think of human friends who have walked together as one. Then think of David and Jonathan, think of Hallam and Tennyson, think of the men of the knotted hearts. These friends walked together and shared their secrets as they walked. "And all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." It is the privilege of the open mind and



heart, the grace of the open door. This surely is the first condition of that invigorating confidence in which a man can trust and not be afraid.

Well, then, for a second thing I should say that in all restful confidence in God there is *a sense of moral repose*. There is no tumult in the neighbourhood of the conscience, no riot which necessitates the reading of the Riot Act. There must be no fear bound to our conscience, not even one of the many fears which are the offspring of guilt. All is quiet in the conscience. And this, too, is all the ministry of the Lord in His gracious work of forgiveness. By His grace He removes the threat from the conscience. He makes it friendly. What has hitherto been a sort of policeman's lamp, to startle us, becomes a kindly household lamp to guide our way from room to room, and to guide us in all the confusing ways of life. By God's good grace guilt is transformed into moral reconciliation. "He hath delivered me from all my fears." Yes, all is quiet with the conscience. "I will not be afraid!"

And, for a last thing, I think that in all



fruitful confidence in God there is *an element of mental expectation*. "My expectation is from Him." All of which means that a really vital trust has a quiet, forward look. It gazes along the road without fear. It expects that every necessity will reveal a providential bounty, and it therefore meets all its needs with a cheer. If the road is startlingly new, and the old guide-posts are few, and their guidance is somewhat effaced and confusing, then vital trust expects a new revelation appropriate to the new demands. "He hath not left Himself without a witness!" "The Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from the holy word." Old lamps will give new light. "In Thy light shall we see light!" And therefore on the new road I will trust and not be afraid.

## XXXIII

### THE FREEDOM OF THE FIXED HEART

“My heart is fixed, O God.”

PSALM lvii. 7.

This man describes his circumstances in extraordinarily vivid speech. Metaphor crowds upon metaphor in almost breathless pace. Every word presents a picture suggesting grave difficulty and antagonism. Figure is piled upon figure in the attempt to express the strenuousness of the conflict. He is “among lions.” He moves “among them that are set on fire.” “Spears and arrows” are hurtling about him. He is in peril of the “sharp sword.” His enemy has “dugged a pit,” and skilfully concealed it. And yet he assumes an attitude towards these perils and antagonisms which gives his spirit strength and leisure to break into song. His altar is not the gloomy seat of lamentation; it is the bright abode of hope and aspiration. “I will sing and give

praise." One would not expect to find song in such circumstances of stress and strain. It brings to mind the birds which sang on the battlefields of Flanders. And yet it is our purpose, triumph in God. It may not be ours to sing the song of ecstasy and rapture, but it is ours to sing the song of confidence and hope. Ours may be the song of security in the howling night.

Now we need not share the circumstance of the Psalmist's external lot, but his vivid symbols may also describe spiritual circumstances in which he and we are closely akin. Who does not know the fierce antagonism of lions and fire? Who is not familiar with the rising of the passions? And who does not know the spear and arrow, especially the treacherous arrow that flieth by day, when no enemy may be seen?

Who has not experienced the thrust of the sharp sword, the fiery dart of the evil one? And who is not aware of the pits of cynicism and pessimism, and many another gloomy hole? Yes, indeed, we know them, and we can share the Psalmist's triumph.

What is his secret? "My heart is fixed, O God." That is his secret. First of all,

this sort of fixedness gives the truest circumspection. We stand still in order to see. In this fixedness we obtain the point of view which gives us the divine vision. The unfixed life has no sight. To be absolutely free is to be blind. We call it "Going about seeing life," but we do not see it at all. What we see we misinterpret. Appetite is just "good living." We mistake the lion for a domestic cat, we play with it and fondle it. We mistake the cunningly covered pit for a bit of juicy pasture. "Sin, that it might appear sin." Ah, that is the difficulty. Sin is so specious, so delusive, so expert in its camouflage. And so we must be fixed in God if we would truly see. "In Thy light shall we see light." When our heart is fixed we see things as they are.

But there is another thing that must be said about the Psalmist's triumph. It is only as the heart is fixed that we become truly free. It may seem as though the fixed heart forfeits its liberty. It is the gravest of all mistakes. The man who has no fixity has no true freedom. Vagrancy is not liberty, it is only license. The first condition of freedom is that we be bound. That

is why we have those strange paradoxes in the letters of the Apostle Paul. He writes about "Paul, the bondsman," and almost in the same breath he sings of "The glorious liberty of the children of God." And the secret of the liberty is found in the bondage. It is just because he is gloriously fixed that he is gloriously free. The spiritually bound find their wings. It is only when we are "in Christ" that we are able to "rise into heavenly places."

Well, it is not far from wings to song. When the heart is fixed we begin to soar. "Because He hath set His love upon me—I will set Him on high." That exaltation is as sure as the being of God.

## XXXIV

### HOW ONE MAN THOUGHT OF GOD

PSALM lxi. 1-4.

This psalm opens with a splendid unveiling of the Psalmist's conception of God. It is like some magnificent orchestral prelude to a great oratorio. The Psalmist is in troubled circumstances. The floods are out. Familiar roads are broken up. Perils abound on every side. He is about to reassure his soul in the midst of the wild convulsion, and he does it in the only way that is worth doing. He fills his consciousness with God. He crowds his mind with the thought of God until there is no room left for treachery or fear, and he enshrines his thoughts in definite images. He does not permit them to come and go as vague abstractions. He makes familiar material things the ministers of spiritual things. One metaphor follows another like a fleet of stately argosies, all of them laden with

precious merchandise, and every one of them carrying balms and spices of inspiration which have been grown on the fields of the soul. How does he think of God?

“*The Rock That is Higher Than I.*”—He finds something bigger than himself. In all the welter he sees Some One bigger than himself. When King Lear is driven and beaten on the storm-swept heath, what would be the use of a rock that is smaller than himself? God must be better than our best, He must be higher than our highest, or our case is hopeless. If God’s love is smaller than a mother’s love, what defence have we amid the fearful gusts of human necessity? But the Rock is higher! “Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee.”

“*A Refuge for Me.*”—God was a home for the fugitive; for sometimes we must take to flight if we would be saved. “Flee youthful lusts!” “Flee from idolatry!” There are some antagonisms which are overcome, not in fight, but in flight. Our triumph is found in masterly retreat. We are not to stand up to them, we are just to leave them. We are to run away from them.

And our refuge is quite near. A turning of the eyes and we are at the door! "God is our refuge . . . a very present help in time of trouble."

"*A Strong Tower from the Enemy.*"—The enemy's fiery darts are helpless when we are sheltered in God's strong tower. I know a noble and venerable castle, and if you ask the folk who live within its walls where they get their water, they will take you into the central keep and show you a spring. The vital fountain is at the very heart of the hoary pile. And so it is with the tower of God's wonderful grace. The soul finds the waters of life in the secret place of the Most High.

"*My Tabernacle.*"—It is perhaps the image of the Bedouin's tent on the desert waste. The wilderness stretches on every side, but there is a hospitable tent, a home in the wilderness. And when the circumstances of my life are wild and inhospitable, and when the mean sand is all round the horizon, "He shall spread His tabernacle over me." Nay, He is my Home, and on the dry wastes I can be at home with the Lord.

"*The Covert of His Wings.*"—God a



mother-bird! What intimacy there is in the revelation! What triumph! What comfort! What tenderness and love! God throws His grace around me like a wing. He draws me to His heart. "Cover my defenceless head with the shadow of Thy wing."

And this great God is thine and mine.

## XXXV

### THE ROCK THAT IS HIGHER

“Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”

PSALM lxi. 2.

We can only find our refuge in something bigger than ourselves. Even our home cannot be just our own size or it would become our grave. We must have room to stretch or we shall shrink. If we were never to meet anybody who is most evidently bigger than ourselves, we should speedily suffer from arrested growth. Even my reading must be a rock that is higher than I. It must lift up mine eyes in aspiration and discovery and wonder. If my books are about my own size, if they make no exacting demand upon me, if the food they offer is only soft stuff with never a hard crust which requires thorough mastication, my mental life would not even be allowed to remain stationary, but would pass through swift impoverishment and deterioration. Yes,

even my books must be higher than I if I am to rise.

And this is true of everything else, but it is pre-eminently true of our God. Our God must be bigger than ourselves or our religion will be a petrification. But the deadly peril is that in our every-day working thought of God, He is often no bigger than ourselves. He is not a great Being to be looked up to and to be greatly worshipped. He is more of our own size, on our own level, a Being to be looked at and not to be revered. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself." That is the real danger, not so much in theory as in practice. We act as though the Holy God were just like ourselves. And so there arises a flippant intimacy which we foolishly regard as freedom. We take liberties with God and call it liberty. There is a hail-fellow-well-met sort of air even about our spiritual communion. There is no adoration, no wonder, no awe which draws us to our knees. We speak to Him without much thought about it. We say "anything that comes." There are no soul silences. *There is no great listening.* We are as big as our

Rock. We are not as those on whom there falls the solemn shadow of the Almighty.

There will be no depth in our life while there is no height in our vision. Our prayers will move among lesser things until we gaze upon the unutterable glory. And here we can be mightily helped by the inspired Word. Let us take some great passage of Scripture where the glory of the Lord is revealed. Let us read it very slowly. Let us linger before the heavenly treasure. Let us fix our eyes steadily upon the glory. Let us kneel before it. Let us look up and pray! I am now before the Rock that is higher than I. And such a prayer could not be thoughtless. It could not be filled with trifles. Even before I begin to speak in audible prayer there will be an enlargement of aspiration and desire. Worship will be ennobled. "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised." I should enter into this Psalmist's secret which is the secret of the Lord.

One other word. The soul finds her true rest in aspiration. The soul cannot rest when it is cramped. There is great rest in

stretching. "Reaching out to the things that are before." That strainless rest becomes ours when the Rock is higher than ourselves.

## XXXVI

### THE ROCK THAT IS HIGHER

“Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”

PSALM lxi. 2.

There is no more tragic condition in life than for the soul to have nothing near it bigger than itself. Spiritual death makes an easy victim of the soul that has nothing to look up to, nothing beyond. The essential secrets of spiritual life and progress are to be found in reverence, and wonder, and admiration, and hope; and when all these have fallen asleep the soul has been surely untouched with the finger of death. Our life shrinks into littleness when we see no rock that is higher than ourselves. But when we can lift up our eyes unto the hills, the power of the heights will come upon us, and we shall sing as we feel their inspiring ministry: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of them that bring us good tidings!”

We need "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." After the fierce heat and dust of the open road, how restful is it to pass into the deep, cool shade of a friendly rock! I have seen the flock leave the exposed pastures in the glowing heat of the noon, and seek the refreshing shelter of a hospitable rock. And we, too, can rest in the shadow of the Almighty in the oppressive rays of the noon. Just when I am inclined to be faint, because of the heat and burden of the day, there is a Rock that is higher than I, and in that cooling Presence He restoreth my soul.

And we need "the Rock that is higher" in order that we may have lofty and comprehensive vision. I am so apt to get lost in details, and I lose the sense of the whole. I become absorbed in the fortunes of the immediate battle, and I lose the sense of the campaign. Or I become a victim of the letter and I lose the large freedom of the spirit. I need to look upon things from a higher point of view. I must see them from above. I want a Rock that is higher than I, and that Rock is Christ! From the Rock we look not only upon our own things, but

also upon the things of others; and not only at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen.

And I need a Rock in which I can find a lofty refuge when I am pursued by my own sin. It must not only be a shadow from the heat, but a shelter from the tempest. It must hide me till the storm of life is past. And that Rock is Christ.



## XXXVII

### THE CONFIDENCE BORN OF DIVINE COMMUNION

“I shall not be greatly moved.”

PSALM lxii. 2.

“I shall not be moved.”

PSALM lxii. 6.

I have brought these two sentences together from different parts of the same Psalm because they seem to suggest a vital progress in the spiritual life of the Psalmist. The Psalmist is contemplating hostile circumstances. He is anticipating tempests of antagonism. He hears the whirlwind raging over the waste. And, as he sees himself caught in the blast, he seems a little shaken by the force of the assault. But he is not overwhelmed, and on the whole he retains his place. “I shall not be greatly moved!” A little later he looks again at the coming tempest, and he sees himself the centre of the violence, but he sees himself immovable. “I shall not be moved!” The significance

of the word "greatly" has vanished, and his mood is transformed. In the first condition there is a trembling; in the second condition there is the firmness of a blessed assurance. In the first there is a shiver of fear—"I shall not be greatly moved;" in the second there is the unshaken confidence of a splendid faith—"I shall not be moved." In the former experience he is dislodged a little from his standing; in the latter experience he is steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. In the first expression of his mood there is something young, uncertain, and immature; in the second expression there is the voice of a more vital trust, and the suggestion of spiritual maturity. He passes from the painful wobbling of "I shall not be greatly moved" to the masculine serenity of "I shall not be moved."

Now, what has happened between the first experience and the second? This has happened: he has been in deeper communion with God. That is the secret. His trembling spirit was soothed in the Divine communion. The timid flutterings of his heart were quieted on the bosom of his God. That is

the secret. It is as when some frightened child is caught up in its mother's arms, and feels the cuddling strength of her embrace. This is the calmness which comes from sharing the stronger life of another. Who has not had this experience even on the lower plane of human fellowships? It may be we are riven with uncertainties and beset with fears; but we pass into the presence and communion of some strong, serene man, and we drink his peace. One strong, quiet man, endowed with large understanding and splendid self-possession, can chase away the fears of a whole nation. He is peace to all his environment.

How much more profoundly true is all this when we raise the relation to our fellowship with God! Fears flourish in mean communions. And so it is with worries, which are the prolific children of fear. They all grow fat and strong when life is lived in small and confined circles, and is bereft of air and vision. Foul things breed in closed rooms. There is something very fusty, something strongly inclining to sickness and fainting in a chamber which never receives cleansing, vitalising visits from the

air of larger worlds. And so it is with the soul. The spirit grows faint and timid when we have no communion with the breath of God. But when we face our perils in communion with the Lord, our timidities are transformed, our uncertainties vanish, and our slipping feet are steadied by being shod with "the preparation of the gospel of peace."

Deeper communion with God is the great secret of spiritual maturity. Our preparation for meeting trying and exacting circumstances is often very ill-arranged. We do this, and that, and the other; we fuss around in twenty ways, and our life remains "a haunt of fears." We meet our days with a divided life, and our heart is not fixed in healthy serenity. We have not the sovereign command which belongs to peace. If only we would give to Divine communion the time and the care which we give to minor preparations we should put on strength and confidence like a robe. "I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and He delivered me from all my fears."

"Take from our lives the strain and stress!" Yes, but who can do that but God?

He can do it, and by His grace it is done. In His strengthening, restoring fellowship we can face all our hostile circumstances with "ordered lives," lives which confess the beauty of God's peace.

## XXXVIII

### SEEKING YET ALWAYS FINDING

“My soul followeth hard after Thee: Thy  
right hand upholdeth me.”

PSALM lxiii. 8.

That is one of the strange conjunctions which are to be found in the Scriptures. They frequently present the aspect of a contradiction. Here is a soul following after the Lord, and yet the hand of the Lord is resting upon him. In one way he is running after; in another way he has arrived. He is on the road, and yet he is at the goal. He is seeking the Lord, but yet he is in communion with Him. It is a paradox in speech, but it is a glorious commonplace in Christian experience. We can be in Christ, and yet we can be following after him. We can be at rest in the Lord, and yet in zealous quest of Him.

Let us mark the vigorous strength of the Psalmist's words. “My soul followeth hard

after Thee.” There is something very intense and strenuous about the figure of speech. Shall we be using the word unlawfully if we interpret it through the imagery of a hound which has found the scent of his prey and is now away on the alluring track in full pursuit? Francis Thompson has a great poem with the great title “The Hound of Heaven,” and under this amazing figure he portrays the sleepless love which is always on the road in quest of the children of men. But may we not reverently say that there is another hound, the hound of earth, which follows the earthly track in sleepless pursuit of God? I mean the soul which is fiercely and continuously inquisitive for the scent of the King’s goings. It searches for the scent in tangled circumstances which are like an intricate brushwood. It searches for the scent across the bitter, marshy ground of tears. It brings all its discerning powers to searching out the path of the Lord in the wilderness of disappointment where the mirage allures us to dry and sandy wastes. “My soul panteth for God, for the living God.” Where is the way of my Saviour’s goings? Where is He

whom my soul loveth? Such is the eagerness of the passionately consecrated life. It is like a hound, keen for the divine scent in every part of the great realm of human interest and experience. When the soul finds the scent, whether it be in the sphere of home, or in business, or in pleasure, or in politics, it follows hard after, and no caressing temptation is able to draw it aside. It runs in the way of God's commandments.

But the quest of the Lord is not a one-sided affair of this kind. If there is the hound of earth, there is also the wonderful love which is the hound of Heaven. It comes forth to seek and to save. It finds us in our low estate. It secretly ministers to us in our quest. "Thy right hand upholdeth me." The Heavenly lover brings secret resource to the runner. He administers His hidden manna to ward off faintness on the road. There is a mystic fellowship in which we eat His flesh and drink His blood. For is not this the wonderful ministry of Grace? The divine grace upholds us while we are on the way to God. It opens its bountiful wallet and brings us inspiration for the journey. It prepares a



table for us in the presence of our enemies.  
We feast while we run.

“The hill of Zion yields  
A thousand sacred sweets,  
Before we reach the heavenly fields  
Or walk the golden streets.”

## XXXIX

### GOD'S TERRIBLE ANSWERS

“By terrible things in righteousness wilt Thou answer us, O God!”

PSALM lxxv. 5.

That is a disturbing paradox, the gracious Lord answering in terrible response. We have some difficulty in thinking of grace expressing itself in terror. It is the same strange conjunction which the Apostle John unveils to us in the Apocalypse. He saw “a Lamb in the midst of the throne,” and yet out of the throne proceeded lightnings! If only some mild, soft light had streamed from the throne it would have seemed altogether congenial—but lightnings! It is like the sound of harpers breaking into thunder. It is like “the soft whisper of a going” over the tops of the trees merging into the rumblings of an earthquake. A strange fellowship is this of grace expressing itself in “terrible things.”

But the great thing to remember is just

this—that the terrific thing can be the vehicle of grace. The seemingly wild thing can carry a very gentle thing. The lightning can enshrine the heart of the Lamb. Our apparent antagonisms are often the very servants of our strength. If we had never been opposed we should never have found our power. Our capacity is discovered in our seasons of deprivation. We come into self-possession along terrible roads. God moves through wintry snows to the coveted harvests. Why should the frost be counted necessary in the process of rearing the golden grain? Well, that is the appointed way. We find our honey in the carcasses of the lions which we have slain. A lion often crouches between us and the feast! The wilderness stretches between us and Canaan! The springs of abiding joy are up in the mountains of rectitude, and there is the hard climb before we can have the delicious draught. We even have to “*strive* to enter into *rest*.” God most assuredly answers our prayers, but we travel to our bounty by the way of “terrible things.”

But who is going to grumble at wintry December if it helps to bring the fruits and

flowers of June? Mark this word of Robertson, of Brighton: "The most valuable book I possess is a remembrance of trials at which I repined, but which I have found were sent in answer to my prayer to be made a minister." God graciously heard his prayer, but He answered in "terrible things" which conveyed the desired strength. We do not find our real robustness in the green pastures and by the still waters, but when He leadeth us in ways of righteousness for His name's sake. On those high, steep roads, where the winds are cold and biting, we find our health and our crowns.

## XL

### LIFE'S MAGNIFICAT

“Let such as love Thy salvation say continually, Let God be magnified.”

PSALM lxx. 4.

The spiritual greatness of these psalmists is seen in the impressive fact that God's statutes have become their songs. They have passed out of the bleak wilderness of statutory obedience into the bright and cheery realm of freedom. They do not wear God's commandments as a strait-jacket which imprisons them in galling restrictions, but rather as a comfortable garment which inspires healthy movement. They are not slaves on the road. They are minstrels. They are not growling God's will. They are singing it, and it transforms the heavy walk into a nimble dance. They love God's salvation. The noblest emotion is wedded to their obedience. Their homage

is an enthusiasm. Their religion is a passion.

And how does such a glowing religion express itself? Has it any striking characteristics? It reveals itself in manifold forms and fashions, but there is one thing in which its expression is constant. It says continually, Let God be magnified. Its conception of sanctity is a vesture that is without seam. Its conception of praise is a song that hath no ending. And what a vision is this, to be held by a Jew who had never seen the Christ! He had got away from the local altar, which had been erected for worship at some particular place along the road, and he now regarded the entire road as an altar. He could worship without ceasing. That would be wonderful at any time, whether in the dimmer days of the early dawn of revelation, or in the fulness of the days when the Sun of Righteousness arose with healing in His wings. It is a marvellous thing in any life when the altar is seen to be as long as the road, and when the Magnificat is an anthem that has no ending. But to find this word in the Old Testa-

ment greatly enhances the wonder. We could take the word of the Psalmist and lift it into one of the letters of the Apostle Paul, and it would not be dimmed by the encircling glory.

How can we magnify God continually? We can do it by making everything God-like. We can take every circumstance which comes to us, every task, every duty, every joy, every sorrow, every victory, every defeat, and in loving God's salvation we can make it wear something of the holiness and loveliness of God. And this means that life's commonplaces can be made to shine with the light of God's countenance. It means that God's Spirit can possess and pervade small events. It means that all our moments can be made calm and bright. By God's grace our hearts can sing the Magnificat through everything. The music of sanctity can be heard in the slenderest reeds.

We magnify God when we do everything magnanimously. Things which are done in a great way magnify God. "Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised." We magnify God when we are truly big, even

when we are doing little things. Never to be small and mean! To think magnanimously! To speak magnanimously! To act magnanimously! To love God's salvation in these things is to sing the Magnificat all the day long.



## XLI

### THE CONSECRATION THAT FINDS HEAVEN ON EARTH

“The whole earth is filled with Thy glory.”

PSALM lxxii. 19.

“Thy will be done on earth.”

MATT. vi. 10.

If our earth has no sanctities for us our heaven will have none. If we can find nothing sacred in the inch we shall find nothing truly sacred in the infinite. If there is nothing venerable in time there will be nothing venerable in eternity. The discovery of a mystical gateway on some common bit of earthly ground gives a new significance to everything. A burning bush at the back of the desert gives a man an entirely new world. A vision at Bethel—that unromantic spot!—with its mystical ladder uniting earth and heaven, creates a new conception of the universe. A local altar has influences whose currency encircles the globe.

And therefore it becomes a matter of uttermost importance when we consecrate our earth-home—its common roads, its fellowships, its ordinary comings and goings, its daily ups and downs, its customary business, its recurring periods of rest. We must diligently look for the sacred gateways in the midst of nature's loveliness, and we must pass through them and reverently enter another realm of surpassing loveliness, of which the first is only the outer type and symbol. We must practise reading the literature of nature, in confident assurance that every beautiful thing has something to say to us if only we will take the trouble to learn the language. Everything has heavenly significance, and bears the seal of divine grace.

If we begin all our thinking with the assumption that earth is only a place of swift transition, and nothing more, a sort of caravansary where we put up for a single night, a sort of small stage for little events, we shall never apprehend the real sublimity of life, nor shall we tread our daily road in fellowship with a mighty purpose. We have sometimes sung the words, "Earth is a

desert drear." But where did we learn it? Who taught us the lesson? Where can such teaching be found in the word of our Lord? We go on to say, "Heaven is our home." Yes, indeed it is, but in the bounty of divine grace we can find some of the home-glory while we are still on the way to it. Something of the mind and the tastes of the owner of the great house can be found on the carriage-drive which leads up to it.

"The Hill of Zion yields a thousand sacred sweets, before we reach the heavenly fields!" I like that better, and we are justified in liking it, because it is backed by the word of the Lord. What wonderfully novel and inspiring things Bunyan's pilgrim found upon the road long before he reached the Celestial City! And this in spite of all the fights he had waged, and the tears he shed. Think of the refreshing springs he found, and he found them just where he needed them. Think of the pleasant arbours which he found prepared for him on the slopes of exhausting hills. And then the lilies—growing where do you think?—in the Valley of Humiliation! And there were strange reviving fragrances on the road like

the wafting of the scent of the sweet briar as you go along your way. Earth was full of revelations of the King's grace. The Lord of the Highway had taken great thought for His pilgrims. Earth was redolent of heaven, and provision was everywhere made for daily growth, and for enlarging consecration and service.

How, then, may we increasingly consecrate the earth through which we have to pass on the way to our eternal home? First of all, *by a deepening adoration*. It can only be attained by the assiduous practice of reverence. The good bishop in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* said that his desires gathered about two things—some flowers on the earth and some stars in the skies. I seem to see in his aspiration an attitude which looks up and a posture which looks down. And shall we say that the “look up” at the stars, and the “look down” at the flowers were to be complementary acts in reverential worship? In the postures of aspiration and admiration he was to find the reality and the gladness of life. But I think these flowers of earth meant something more than this. They surely

referred to all the sweet and fragrant things of life—its tender affections, its simple courtesies, its kindnesses, and in these the good bishop's spirit was to find reverent communion with God. And then the stars above! The stars of revelation! The gleamings of divine truth! The ever-new shinings in the sky of his soul! And especially, and beyond all and everything else, the wonderful shining of Him who is known to us as the bright and Morning Star. We cultivate the spirit of adoration by looking always and everywhere for God, and by seeking to incarnate the revelation in our own daily life and practice.

And a second way of consecrating our earth-home is *by an ever-expanding affection*. We make every place venerable when we make it the habitation of a larger love. Wherever and whenever love finds a new expression, God's world receives a deeper consecration. Love always converts a house into a home, and more love makes the home more lovely. And in its new power love makes new discoveries of the love of God and of the world of human life. "Let your love abound yet more and more in all knowl-

edge and discernment." The bigger love always finds itself in a bigger world; new side chapels are revealed in the growing cathedral of human life.

And lastly, we consecrate our earth-home in *an enlarging sense of duty* and in the quest of nobler service. Whenever a moral obligation becomes a delight, whenever the old rock becomes the place of a spring, the earth is being enriched. Whenever a necessary yoke is worn with joy the road is transfigured. Whenever we have brought out our wallet and ministered to some one who is bruised and broken, and when we have done it as one of the joys of life, we have left a fragrance about the place as of incense which gathers about an altar.

## XLII

### THE PLACE OF THE SOLVED PROBLEM

“Until I went into the sanctuary.”

PSALM lxxiii. 17.

The Psalmist was filled with confusion until he went into the sanctuary. And the sanctuary is not necessarily a temple made with hands. It is possible to be in a place of worship and not be in the sanctuary. We can enter the door of the church and still be in the street. That was the deadly bane of Pharisaism. It was inside the house made with hands; it was outside the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. When we are inside the material walls there is a further journey to be made before the sanctuary is reached; we have to pass through the walls of the letter into the spirit, through the roadway of formalities into vital communion, through every ecclesiastical commonplace into the secret place.

And yet a church may be, and ought to



be, the best of all ways of getting into the sanctuary of the Lord. Its walls are the witnesses of wonderful experiences. They have no speech nor language, yet they echo the songs of pilgrims who have found the eternal peace. The church is fragrant with the mystic incense of victorious suppliants. It carries venerable stores of precious traditions. And in the church we meet fellow-seekers, intent upon the sanctuary—one with an anthem, another with a burden, one with a sigh and a cry, and another with a song of deliverance.

So long as this Psalmist remained outside the sanctuary he was shocked and perplexed even to despair. All things seemed thrown together into a jumble, a jarring discord, a hopeless entanglement to which he had no clue. All the ground around him seemed to be one wide, marshy waste in which he could find no footing. Everything yielded! There was no rock, no rock of ages!

And in this perplexity and sinking of mind and of heart he “went into the sanctuary.” And something happened which lifted him out of the horrible pit and the miry clay, and set his feet upon a rock, and



established his goings. He was steadied. He was quieted. It was not that he received some brilliant and satisfying interpretation of events, but that there was given to him an assured and satisfying communion with the Lord by whom the events were controlled. He did not find a clue, he found his God; not a clear explanation, but a great Companion. The miracle was not that his path was made to blaze with light; it was rather that the Lord touched him and the fever left him.

“We touch Him in life’s throng and press,  
And we are whole again!”

And in these awful and chaotic days the way into the sanctuary is open, wide open! And the Lord is waiting for His bewildered pilgrims, waiting with the gracious gifts of assurance, courage, and peace.

## XLIII

### SPRINGS IN THE DESERT

“Who, passing through the valley of weeping, make it a place of springs.”

PSALM lxxxiv. 6.

The word of the Psalmist would almost suggest that this wonderful transformation was effected by the pilgrims themselves as they trudged along the dry and gloomy valley. They made the valley a place of springs. In a certain way this is gloriously true. The refreshing springs were really great discoveries, but the pilgrims had cultivated the faith and the disposition which are the instruments of vision, and it was by means of these spiritual ministries that the mystic waters were found. In a very true way a new lens is a creator of a new world. What a revelation it is to a man of dull and imperfect sight when he first puts on a pair of glasses which rectify his weakness! What new imagery! What light! What

colour! And so it is with a change of heart. Life is transformed by a new medium, and we discover a new world, abounding in spiritual resources, and musical with laughing, cheery springs of grace.

Here is a pilgrim travelling through the valley of affliction in feverish and impatient mood. What is the valley like to such a traveller? It is hard and cheerless. It is like a lava-strewn countryside after a volcanic eruption. Everything is black, and grey, and forbidding. It is just a dry and joyless waste. But if the pilgrim's mood could be changed into the patience of Christ, what a change there would be in the valley! For patience is a minister of fine discernment. It is endowed with the rarest senses. An inconsiderate judgment might suppose that impatience is more sensitive than patience, but that is never so. Impatience is irritable, and irritable folk are really very insensitive. They are acute in a small segment, they are numb in the circuit of the larger circle. Patience is alert on the entire circumference. Patience is very quick in seeing and hearing. When our patience in

Christ has her "perfect work" our discernments are brought to superlative refinement. We hear the running brook in the desert, and we have the divining rod which discovers the wells of salvation. We make the valley a place of springs.

Or take even finer graces still. Here is a misanthropist in the valley of affliction. What does he find in the valley? He finds nothing but aches and pains. Nothing bears the token of grace. He hears no running streams of grace. It is a ghastly journey. But now transform the misanthropist into a lover! Exchange the dark spiritual medium for one lucent as a diamond! And it is amazing what friendly presences abound in the valley. Mercies and tokens of Providence troop out on every side. The valley becomes a place of springs.

It makes a whole world of difference whether we go through the valley of affliction in the spirit of faith, or in darkening unbelief, whether we journey alone or in the confidence of God's companionship. In times like these through which we are passing the valley can be a terrible place! But if

we travel with the Lord our distress will not be unrelieved. We shall discover the springs which the Lord of the country has appointed for His pilgrims. We shall drink of the brook by the way.

## XLIV

### GOD OUR HOME

“Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place.”

PSALM xc. 1.

“Our dwelling-place.” It is the lovely and winsome figure of a home. The word recalls what ought to be to us the most alluring and radiant spot on the planet. And then it applies the remembrance to the interpretation of the hospitable house of the love and grace of God. Anybody can furnish a house if he has the money; but no money can furnish a home. Home means a certain atmosphere. It is indefinable and indescribable. It means a certain communion which is so sensitive and refined as to be almost independent of speech. It is the realm of a wireless ministry of a superlative order. Home means a delicious freedom whose very simplicity is its defence. Home means love, deep as life and deeper than death. The authority of the home is

steeped in grace. Its bonds are silken cords. Its statutes are songs. Let us think of all these riches and we may then begin to feel the amazing welcome and the boundless grace that are hidden in this old familiar word, "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations."

Now, there are multitudes of people who do not settle down in God as their spiritual home and enjoy abiding communion. God is only a temporary refuge, not a permanent home. Their religion is a sort of umbrella which they use in a storm. It plays no part in days when the storm is over, and the weather is calm and bright, and every circumstance is genial and comforting. God is just a shelter in time of trouble. He is not a home.

There are others to whom the Lord is only as a temple to which they periodically recur for stated and formal devotion. They pay visits to God. They do not live with Him. They have hours of worship, but they do not offer Him their life. They flirt with God, they do not seek the settled fellowship of wedded communion. They go to His temple, they do not live in His home.

And all this misses the real inheritance. God alone is our true home. And until we make Him our home everything in our life will be pinched and dwarfed like stunted trees which are away from their native clime. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me?" Why so drooping? Why so stunted? Why so withered? Get away to thy native clime! Get away home to God! Thou art in the smothering air of the world. Away home! Get to thy native air, into the vitalising communion of the Father, for there thou shalt find the wealth of thy sonship, and there disquietude shall be changed into confidence, and anxiety transformed into rest! O my soul, thou art living in the streets of vagrancy! Away to thy home in the Lord!



## XLV

### THE SATISFYING MERCY OF GOD

“O satisfy us early with Thy mercy.”

PSALM xc. 14.

Every life might be tested by its satisfactions. We should get its measures from its pleasures. What it regards as its bread would be an index of its strength. We say of some folks that they are “easily satisfied.” They have no cravings that are intense and far-reaching. Others seem to find satisfaction in vapid things, insipid things, things devoid of glowing vitality. Others again have low satisfactions. They are contented with tainted food. The nauseous offers them welcome delights. And all these satisfactions are self-revealing; they reveal the quality of our lives.

But what a scanty way is this of using the word “satisfaction”! It reminds me of a house which was not far from the home of my boyhood. I used to gaze upon it with

boyish wonder and dread. It used to be said that the house had as many windows as there are weeks in the year, and as many panes of glass as there are days. I used to stand and count, and count, but I could only see two sides of the building, and I had to guess at the rest. But the weird thing was this, that the hermit who lived in the great house was said to use only one room. All the other rooms were locked up, and they were festooned with cobwebs and thick with dust. And there are folk who act like that in the many-roomed mansion of life. They occupy only one room, and the rest of the rooms are surrendered to dust and death. But what a small thing is this satisfaction of the one room when all the other chambers are crumbling in decay! And how low is the satisfaction which dwells in the basement when there are upper rooms, with invigorating air and sunshine, whose windows look out over large realms of spiritual inheritance! It is not worth calling satisfaction, for only a very small part of life is satisfied, and the rest is fast asleep.

But here is a man who is seeking satisfaction in the mercy of God. "O satisfy me

early with Thy mercy." How much treasure there must be in that word "mercy." There is pity, and far more than pity. There is pardon, and far more than pardon. There is light, and far more than light. Mercy is far more than a healing touch which makes our leprosy drop away like an unclean garment. God's gift of mercy is the gift of Himself. It is far more than a decree. It is far more than an amnesty proclaimed by one of His ambassadors. It is the Lord Himself coming to our life to abide with us as the secret of all spiritual emancipation and abiding health. And, therefore, when we think of God's mercy we must think of something tremendous, something as great in its movement and issues as anything we can conceive. "There's a wideness in God's mercy like the wideness of the sea."

And it is because God's mercy is just God that it fills the soul with the deepest and loftiest satisfaction. It is the incoming of a spiritual vitality which quickens all things. It is a river of water and life, and "everything shall live whither the river cometh." All the coronal powers of the soul awake, and it is in their wakefulness and activity

that our soul begins to taste of satisfaction. It is the satisfaction of health. It is the satisfaction of moral aspiration and progress. God satisfies every craving with "good things."

"O satisfy us early with Thy mercy." I have somewhere read that Dr. Rainy once preached a mighty sermon on these words. The sermon had two divisions. And this was the first: "Thy mercy—for nothing but Thy mercy will satisfy me." And this was the second division: "Early—for the sooner I get it the better." Yes, the sooner the better! God's mercy is satisfaction in the earliest morning of life, and it is satisfaction when the day is far spent and night is at hand.

## XLVI

### THE COOLING SHADOW

“He shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”

PSALM xci. 1.

That is the all-sufficient safeguard against the perils of feverishness. In “the shadow of the Almighty” we are sheltered from all destructive heat—the heat of burning fear, the heat of temper, the heat of fretfulness, and every other form of unholy fire which so often destroys the delicate treasures of the soul. The shadow of the Almighty will keep us cool and collected, and all our powers will do their work in quietness. Every day we encounter friction in some mode or another, and friction always tends to engender a dangerous heat. Sometimes the friction is occasioned by the encounter of unwelcome circumstances, perhaps a rough piece of duty, or perhaps the unwise obstinacy of a friend or fellow-worker, or again it may be

the merest trifle, like a grain of dust inflaming the eye. The friction may come in a thousand ways, and the spiritual peril is in the heat which accompanies it.

Now in all these inflammatory perils our safety is to turn into "the shadow of the Almighty." And we must do it consciously. It is not a long and tedious journey. It is even a shorter step than passing from the hot streets of Ludgate Hill into the deep and restful shadows of St. Paul's. Nay, just a prayer and our soul is in the shade! The holy Lord breathes "through the pulses of desire His coolness and His balm." In that gracious coolness we can rest and collect ourselves when the hot breezes are blowing over our lives. The shadow of the Almighty is precious for all who are in peril of "the destruction that wasteth at noonday." Let such pilgrims turn to that secret place, and they will find the blessed Lord within the shadow, and He will be host unto the weary soul, imparting His own quietness and peace.

## XLVII

### THE NOISOME PESTILENCE

“He shall deliver thee from . . . the noisome pestilence.”

PSALM xci. 3.

It is one thing to deliver us from the influence of acts, it is a deeper thing to deliver us from the influence of an atmosphere. There are forces which operate like air, they besiege us like atmospheres. We may escape the blighting influence of some particular member of a club, but it is a more difficult thing to find escape from the influence of the club itself. There are antagonisms which are like climates. We draw our breath in hostilities. There is the climate of worldliness. There is the air of frivolity. There is the pestilence of vulgarity. Sometimes our spiritual enemy is discovered in the spirit of the age. The surrounding air can be foul or fair, and our very breathing may be a minister of enervation or strength.

Now we have the promise of the Lord to provide a defence against a pestilential atmosphere. Here is our sufficiency against evil infection. And how is our safety effected? By making it possible for a man to carry his own defensive atmosphere into the most destructive climate. Our firemen are now provided with helmets in which they can carry fresh air with them into the thick smoke of desolating fires. In the suffocating fumes the fireman breathes at ease. And so it is in the choking, dulling atmosphere of the world: we can take our own climate with us, and we can breathe the air of heaven even amid the most noxious fumes of sin.

Dr. George Adam Smith gives this significant rendering of a familiar phrase in the book of Isaiah: "He shall draw in breath in the fear of the Lord." A man who does that is breathing mountain air wherever he is. No plague shall come nigh his dwelling. He is immune from the noisome pestilence. His spiritual atmosphere is the breath of the Holy Ghost.



## XLVIII

### BREEDING IN THE NIGHT

“The pestilence that walketh in darkness.”

PSALM xci. 6.

There are deadly things which find their kingdom in the night. In the day-time they lose their sovereignty, but they recover it again in the darkness. I know there are fatal presences which are conceived in the sunshine, and they flourish and fatten in the prosperous day. There is a “destruction that wasteth at noonday.” In the day’s meridian this peril is at its height. “ ’Tis the bright day that bringeth forth the adder.” There is an arrow that flieth by day, and many a man is slain in the hour when there is no cloud in his sky.

But when the sun has gone down, and when the warmth of the twilight has faded away, and the night winds and the darkness possess our ways, other deadly perils creep out and assail our souls. And here is one

which the Psalmist portrays under the figure of a pestilence, "the pestilence that walketh in darkness." It affects the spirit of man like a deadly atmosphere, like the gas which steals upon the men in the trenches, and the nobler powers of the soul are sunk into a fatal sleep. It bears down upon us when we are down, when the light of our joy has been blown out, and when our radiant hopes have gone out of our sky like meteors which have flashed into darkness. The pestilence claims us when we are depressed.

Sometimes the pestilence takes the form of pessimism, and it seems to make the soul incapable of thinking of the coming day. "The radiant morn has passed away!" The golden day is behind us. Life has no longer any hidden uses or glory. All that is left of the harvest is the thrashed and empty straw. All of which means that this sort of pestilence puts all the forward-looking powers of the soul to sleep—its faith, its hope, the imagination which carries divine visions, its power of prayer, its patience, its perseverance. They all fall asleep under the nefarious influence of this "pestilence which walketh in darkness."

And sometimes the pestilence takes the form of cynicism. While pessimism throws a cloud over everything, cynicism turns everything sour. And it begins with "the milk of human kindness." The genial instincts of the soul are embittered. Its gracious sympathies grow harsh, and are like fine apple trees which have retrograded to the crab. Life loses its sweetness, its noble healthiness, its soundness of temper and of spirit.

How are we to escape these pestilences which steal about in the night? The Psalmist gives us the secret. We are to "dwell in the secret place of the Most High." When we dwell in the shadow of the Almighty our changing circumstances do not affect our spiritual atmosphere. Indeed, we take our climate with us, which is the climate of heaven, and midnight is just as healthy as morning, for it is sweet with the incense-breathing Presence of the eternal God.

## XLIX

### INSECT RAVAGE

“Neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.”

PSALM xci. 10.

The insect which carries the plague is a very insidious thing. Who knows just where it is and what it is doing? Who can understand his errors? Who is fully acquainted with the secret faults which give the pest its chance? Secret faults are very hidden things. A man may have some knowledge of his “presumptuous sins,” although it is astounding what big uglinesses we can carry and not be aware of them. We may have faults which stare upon our fellows like placards in the streets, and yet we may be quite unconscious of them. “Thou sayest, I am rich, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” That was gigantic ignorance; it was almost incredible delusion. But, even if we assume

that one may have acquaintance with his big vices and necessities, there are others of a more hidden order, which are just as deadly and of which we may be blindly ignorant. It may be that we can see a destructive fire which is ravaging the garden; but who, without vigilant and prying search, can find the deadly insects which hide themselves in the dim chambers of the bark of the tree, or coil up in the shelter of young leaves, or lurk in the flower, or make their home in the very heart of the fruit? These call for the keenest and most suspicious watchfulness. And so it is in the soul, in the mysterious realm of human life and character. There are seemingly small things which are full of deadliness. They are the fatal insects of the soul, and their ravage is wrought in great secrecy, and it is to our wisdom that we know how to deal with them.

There has recently been a most interesting meeting of entomologists. The assembly was summoned by the Government from every part of the British Empire. The members came to report progress in the warfare against destructive insects which play so vast a part in the spread of the worst

plagues that affect mankind. Expeditions have been at work studying the habits and distribution of the tse-tse fly which conveys the sleeping sickness. Others have been tracking the habits of another blood-sucking fly which, owing to the opening of the Panama Canal, may become a danger to Eastern Asia, as it is well known to be the carrier of yellow fever. Other scientists have been studying crop pests, such as cotton pests, sugar pests, and pests which attack great forests in secret hosts. The work of this great society represents the organised assault of an Empire upon its destructive pests.

And all the time I was reading the record of these proceedings I was wondering what would happen if we had a similarly strong and disciplined warfare against the more deadly pests which burrow and work in the souls of men. What would happen if we sought and distributed knowledge as to the modes of their invasion, and how to guard against it, and how to destroy the invader if once he gains a footing? One issue stood out very clearly in the recent conference in London. All the reports were in agreement

that the best defence against destructive tree pests is the tree's own exuberant health. The pests prowl about in search of sickly trees. They go out exploring for weak spots. They scout around places where the defences are slender, and there they cross the frontier. If, because of negligence, or for any cause, a tree is "off-colour," and its life is scanty and sluggish, the pests arrive and take possession.

But this is just the teaching of the word of God about the welfare of the soul. Again and again we are taught that our immunity from secret and deadly foes is to be found in spiritual health and vigour. We are counselled and commanded to attend to the great necessities which are essential to spiritual health, and the soul will then resist the foul invader and refuse him even the scantiest hospitality. We shall starve him out. He will die from lack of provision. "The prince of this world cometh and he hath nothing in me." Yes, but how are we to preserve this defenceful health? By attending to the great primary relation of the soul. Does the Word offer us any counsel about it? There is this great guiding word: "He that

dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide in the shadow of the Almighty." That shadow is the death of the foul pest. It cannot live or breathe in the shadow of the Almighty. It dies as soon as it enters. The pest never gets near the soul. In the same psalm which tells me about the shadow I am given the happy assurance that I need not be afraid of "the pestilence that walketh in darkness," for no plague shall ever come nigh my dwelling. In God, and in God alone, we find our security.



## L

### THE SECURITY OF THE HEIGHTS

“Because he hath set his love upon Me . . . I  
will set him on high.”

PSALM xci. 14.

The only moral security is to be found in the heights. The only escape from many things is to be above them. If we meet them on their own level we shall be undone. The principle of immunity is this—salvation by elevation. The deadly chlorine, which was used in the war with such frightful destructiveness, moves along the ground, closely clinging to it on its fatal errand. It assails the foot-soldiers; it does not reach the aviator, the man with wings! And in the realm of the spirit there is a “pestilence which walketh in darkness.” It is of the earth earthy, and it steals along the low grounds. It finds its victims among those who are described by our Lord as “from beneath.” It has no power over those who

have risen with Christ, and who sit with Him in the heavenly places. The lofty character carries its own immunity.

Perhaps we have over-emphasised the element of struggle in the Christian life. Perhaps we have proclaimed too vigorously the necessity of fighting our way through serried ranks of foes, and we have said too little about rising above them. Maybe we have not known as we might the power of the resurrection. We have only regarded foot-warfare; we have forgotten the wings! We have counselled men to face their enemies; the Lord is calling us to rise above them.

The secret of security is devout communion with the Lord. We must think less about our foes, and more about our Saviour. We must set our love upon Him. Love always moves in the direction of the beloved. That is a spiritual tendency which cannot be broken. If we love the Lord we surely begin to rise. We enter into the wonder of "the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus." The soul experiences its ascension. We mount up with wings as eagles. And the

ground-enemies, the deadly gases which creep along the low levels, have no power over us, for they have been left behind. "Neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling."

## LI

### THE DARKNESS AND THE PESTILENCE

“The pestilence that walketh in darkness.”

PSALM xci. 6.

There are some things which awake in the night. They sleep when the sun is going his rounds. When the sun goes down they open their eyes and their day begins. The sunset is their dawn, and they begin their labours when all other things go to rest. The other night, when darkness reigned, a bat flew in at my bedroom window, and he glided out again with a speed which puts the swiftest aircraft to shame. He never visits me in the noon. He makes his appearance in the dusky twilight, and he threads the pathways of the gloom. The same night, and every night, owls hoot and screech at the bottom of my garden. I have never heard them when the sun is shining. The hoot is never mingled with the sweet, tremulous call of the robin, or the rich contralto notes of the thrush. No, owls and

bats come when light thickens, and the darkness is their day.

There are other things which hide in the light and steal out in the night. The nightshade unseals her sickly breath in the darkness. Other poisonous things do their subtle commerce on the wings of the night. They have no fellowship with the sunshine; they cannot use it, and they stay their movements until it is withdrawn.

“Well, there is something analogous to all this in human life. The darkness falls, and unfamiliar things come out. The joyful day is over. The feast is ended. Chilly airs breathe round about us. Perhaps we have had bright hours of triumph, and now failure looks into our window. Or perhaps it is that radiant strength is changing into weakness. Or perhaps that dull, heavy thing called pain has made its appearance in our streets. Or perhaps one sunny presence after another has fallen, until now we walk in an “encircling gloom,” and the hours are very lonely, and very cold. The night is dark, and we seem far from home, and the darkness is haunted by troublesome things which break and startle our rest.

Yes, there are troublesome things which come with our night, things which never showed themselves in the sunshine. It is quite easy to name some of these creatures and creations of the darkness. For example, here are two things whose presence breathes through the soul like a pestilence when night has fallen upon us. John Bunyan has called them Timorous and Mistrust. We never knew them in the daytime. No one ever saw or felt them around our doors. We moved in happy confidence, as though friendly eyes were watching us, and the angel of the Lord camped round about us. But now our health is broken. Or the strength has gone out of our business. Or death has been to our door. And we have become timorous and mistrustful, as though those friendly, watchful eyes had gone to sleep, and as though the sentinel angel had struck his tent and gone away to pitch his camp at somebody else's door. And so the soul is filled with fear, and the fear is just the pestilence that walketh in darkness.

But it may be that in our darkness we have not become possessed by any mood so perilous as mistrust. It may be that only

a chilling despondency has crept over the soul. But what is despondency? It is a lowering of the spiritual temperature. It is a sort of chill which affects all the spiritual organs with torpor. Or if the chill does not act in the way of desensitising our spirits, it may do as chills often do, it may produce a feverishness which is often the parent of a very dangerous progeny. The chill of despondency may excite the destructive heat of fretfulness, or its kindred ailments of murmuring or complaint. In the days of warm sunshine these moods never afflicted us. Praise and thanksgiving sang like sweet songsters in the garden of the soul. But now the night air has driven away the singing bird, and more doleful things, things of the darkness, have taken its place.

There are other things which awake in the night. Pessimism is a child of the darkness. And so is disloyalty. And so is desertion. And there are many others which my readers can name for themselves, for they will well remember how, when the darkness fell across their lives, these things came stealthily to their doors. All these are

just as much the things of the night as the bat which flew around my chamber, or the owl which hooted in the gloom at the bottom of the garden.

Well, what shall we do when the sun goes down, and the night comes over us? I think one of the first things to do is this—remember that the darkness in itself is not dangerous. There is nothing necessarily perilous in the night air. I very well remember how we used to be told not to go out in the night air, as though it carried something exceedingly deadly in its wings. But now we are being told that the night air may be even purer than the air that breathes by day. The traffic is stilled, and the clouds of dust have fallen to rest. Factories have ceased their labour, and their chimneys no longer belch forth their dense and sulphurous abomination. And thus the darkness may in some respects be safer than the light. It is the chill which may come with the darkness which is the deadly ally of the pestilence.

Where, then, is our safety to be found? Well, let it be clearly noted that this wonderful ninety-first psalm is full of God. Even



though the darkness has fallen, all the great movements are God's or are inspired by God. The darkness is filled with all sorts of securities which are the provision of His love. See how some of the great words run which tell about the refuges and the hostels of the night:—"The secret place of the Most High"; "the shadow of the Almighty"; "His feathers"; "under His wings"; "thy shield"; "thy buckler." What words are these which tell how the seemingly empty night is filled with the presence of God! It is not only that there are refuges in which weary pilgrims, who have been overtaken by the darkness, can find warmth and light and hospitality. It is not only a lit-up cottage by the way, and beyond it the cold, dark road again. The deliverance is a moving one, and the divine Host keeps step and pace with our need. "I will be with him in trouble!" That is the great revealing word, for that is the Presence which turns every inch of road into a hostel, and provides a warm fireside wherever the bitter winds loose themselves in fiercest siege.

And therefore the contest is not the unequal one between the soul and the perils

of the night. The contest is between the soul, hiding and trusting under God's wings, and all the plagues and pestilences which may seek to breathe their foul breath upon it! "Neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling!" We are secluded with the Almighty, and in the thickest night our security is complete.

If, then, the "curfew tolls the knell of parting day," if the fair day-landscape is glimmering and fading on the sight, let the startled soul turn its face toward home! And home is not far away, for home is God, and God is as near as our glance, and vastly nearer than our cry. In trust and quietness let the darkened soul breathe these familiar words:—

"Sun of my soul, thou Saviour dear,  
It is not night if Thou be near!"

Or these words:—

"Abide with me! fast falls the eventide;  
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide!"

And lo! it shall be found that the desolate hour becomes the hour of the Lord's visitation, and "the night shall shine as the day."

## LII

### KEEPING YOUNG

“They shall still bring forth fruit in old age.”

PSALM xcii. 14.

I wonder if Mrs. Humphry Ward is quite right in a word she has used of Mr. Stopford Brooke. It is found in her reminiscences of a very crowded life. She says that Stopford Brooke's old age was “a triumph in the most difficult of arts.” “He was young to the very end, he knew what to give up, and what to keep, and his freshness of feeling never failed.” I am wondering if the word “arts” gives the right interpretation. Mrs. Ward's words have always spacious meanings. Perhaps it is wrong to question her usage here. But the word “arts” seems to suggest too much effort, too much careful purpose, too much anxious design, to explain something which ought to be very natural. One sometimes hears of

people who are "trying to keep young," and their efforts are frequently not a little pitiful. They force themselves to go here and there and they constrain themselves into this mood and that mood, and they usually get very weary in their endeavours, and the wrinkles gather about their spirits as they have already gathered about their brows. Their efforts are too mechanical. It is something like a table fountain I once saw in a friend's dining-room. The waters were leaping and dancing like strong springs in the heather; but, alas! I could hear the click of the machinery. There was too much art and too little nature and life.

I like the spiritual word better than Mrs. Ward's. "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age." That takes us from art to nature, from the machinery into the garden. The beautiful growths are natural and spontaneous. They are the inevitable issues of certain deep and vital relationships. "They that be planted in the house of the Lord shall bring forth fruit in old age." A certain rootage is to result in certain fruitage. We are to abide in a certain soil and the fruit is sure. "He that abideth

in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." And the fruit does not become more meagre as the years increase. That is one of the marvellous surprises of renewing grace; the spiritual fertility is maintained to the end of the days. The Scriptures use the figure of the vine, or the garden, or the field whenever they wish to suggest the secret of a fruitfulness which is uninjured by the wintry rigours of old age. The lovely fruit can be found upon the tree in the far-off years.

But there is even more than this. "His leaf also shall not wither." That seems to suggest an antidote to the withering influence of the years. Even the leaf is to keep green. It is not to become sere and yellow. And the leaf is the early thing, the first thing, the thing of the springtime. "The tender leaves of hope." These are to be upon the tree at seventy as they were at twenty. A man who is rooted deeply in the Lord is to carry an optimistic spirit when he is old. He is to bear the leaves of hope, and expectation, and eager interest and cheerfulness. The young things are to be his when the birthday book tells a different story. At

autumn-time his spirit is to be bright with the promise of the spring.

If there is any art at all, it consists in just burying one's roots in the Lord. If we are rooted and grounded in Him, the increasing years will have no terror. We shall face them with the alertness of children, and we shall greet the unseen with a cheer.

## LIII

### THE HALLOWING OF LIFE

“Let us worship and bow down: let us kneel  
before the Lord our Maker.”

PSALM xcv. 6.

An act of worship is intended to hallow the life. It is not a fleeting bit of ritualism, a spasm of homage which passes with the hour. It is purposed to be the expression of a mood in which everything in life is to be sanctified. Acts of worship are to create the atmosphere in which we live and move and have our being. Shall we say that the acts are to create attitudes, so that when we leave the sanctuary the spirit of worship is to accompany us into our common life? I am to take the reverence of the Church into the market. The spirit of adoration is to be with me in the country lane. Yes, a certain awe is to be at the background of my festivity, hallowing my movement, and making my laughter pure and sweet as the morning song of birds.

So do I say that when we go to worship we go to hallow life. The hour is spent in the service of the year. And let us remember that in these acts posture helps the mood of worship. "Let us worship . . . let us kneel." We add fresh difficulties to the soul when we deny it the helpmeet of the body. When the body lounges, the soul finds it hard to worship. A man with his hands in his pockets will find it difficult to pray. Yes, irreverent postures are unfriendly to adoration. And therefore let us make our bodies the servants of our souls. When we worship, let our bodies manifest the wished-for mood of the soul. "Let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker."



## LIV

### GREAT PRAISE

“The Lord is great, and greatly to be praised.”

PSALM xcvi. 4.

The only way to attain to great praise is by contemplating the greatness of God, to whom the praise is offered. We have new conceptions of the values of things when we are consciously in the presence of the Divine glory. Things which pass muster in a worldly consciousness are revealed as poor “deficients” when they are paraded in the radiance of the Eternal Light. It is like as it is with garments. There are garments which appear almost new on a gloomy day, but if the sunshine should chance to leap out for an hour the garments look very seedy, and we are inclined to make our way through quiet streets. And when our minds are not possessed by the wonderful sense of God’s greatness, much of what we call praise

may seem very fine and very finished, and we may describe it as splendid or magnificent; but when we get a glimpse of the glory which dwelleth between the cherubims, it may all seem very mean and tawdry. It may appear as stage scenery does when it is brought from the obscuring rays of the lime-light into the blaze of the all-revealing light of God's noon.

And yet there are bits of human praise which God loves to hear and see, and for the reason that they are altogether lovely. It is praise that shares something of the strength and beauty which pervade the adoration of the saints around the throne of God. It is the sincere expression of holy contemplation and desire. It is filled with the exhilarating gratitude which springs from sacred joy. It is the natural speech of the redeemed. It is the rhapsody of love in the presence of the Beloved. And when praise is thus natural and sincere it has become as instinctive as the songs of birds at the dawn.

It is therefore the merest commonplace to say that great praise is not primarily a thing of material means, however cultured they may be, however exquisite, however

faultless in their refinements. Great praise is not to be judged by the excellences of concords and sweet sounds. And all this is said not to disparage or in any way undervalue vocal and instrumental loveliness. It may be that the truly praiseful spirit will go out in search of adequate means for the expression of its own waiting moods. It may be that it will seek accompaniments in the form of disciplined voice or choral fellowship or in psaltery and trumpet.

But great praise is not necessarily in these things, and it can certainly do without them. Praise which is praise indeed is first of all found in the songs and melodies of the soul. And so it happens that there can be the richest choral harmonies in a Quaker meeting-house, where there is no organ and no choir, and where the stillness is not broken by any sound of hymn or psalm. I can well imagine that to the fine apprehension of heavenly listeners wonderful strains of praise are heard in these silent fellowships. For praise consists in high thinking and deep feeling. It moves in reverence and adoration and thanksgiving and holy joy. And praise is great wherever reverence is

great. Praise is great wherever adoration lays hold of heavenly things. Praise is great where love whispers deep secrets in the hearing of the Beloved, in whose astonishing grace it was first of all born. And so it is that this kind of praise goes on when public worship is over and the church door is locked and the congregation has gone away home. The vital praise is in the heart of the worshipper, and as he goes home its magic transforms dull streets into cathedral aisles; and next day it fills the workshop, which may be the home of clatter and clamour, with ethereal harmonies. I always pause, with a little hesitancy, when I reach those two familiar lines in one of our noblest hymns:—

“Life’s duties we must meet again,  
We cannot at the shrine remain.”

There is something here which seems to separate the duty and the shrine, but in subsequent lines the divorce is rescinded; for in the deepest sense we can remain at the shrine, even when we have left it, and the incense can be rising from our altars as ceaselessly as the adoration of the angels,

of whom it is said, "They serve Him day and night in His temple."

A great spirit takes its great praise into its duties. Nay, what is great performance of any duty but the soul at its shrine, bowing in a blessed concordance with the Divine will? A great fulfilment of duty, however forbidding the duty may appear, especially when the fulfilment is accompanied by a hidden joy, a joy like a nightingale singing in the inner depths of a gloomy wood, is surely great praise. And all this is true of every virtue which has warmth in it, and radiance, and which goes singing on its way. Without the praise in it any virtue has something dull at its heart, but with praise in it the greyest virtue has a secret melody which arrests the heart of God. For instance, here is a virtue to which the New Testament gives conspicuous rank. It calls it "long-suffering." But long-suffering may be a very cheerless thing, like a sombre church tower without a belfry. But what about this combination which I find in one of the letters of the Apostle Paul! He speaks of "long-suffering *with joyfulness*." There you have the belfry in the tower!

There the plainly-feathered bird becomes a songster—a lark, singing at the gates of heaven. That is surely great praise.

But this great praise may not only be expressed in splendid duties, in noble virtues, and in chivalrous moods; we can surely take our praise into our frivolities. When jest and quip are flying about, or when we become so light-hearted as to be almost light-headed, the incense at the secret shrine may still be rising. Even the frivolous may have a sort of natural opening into the eternal. How gloriously some men can play the fool! I am thinking of one now as I write. What a saint he is, and what a splendid fool! But somehow or other, when he puts on the cap and bells, and the boisterous fun begins, his soul does not put off its knightly armour. There is knighthood at the very heart of his frivolity. He is a great gentleman, even when he is a glorious fool. There is a doxology at the soul of his comedy, and his praise to God can use the ministry of cleanest laughter. Yes, even in this way we can rejoice in the Lord, and even in the play-fields of life we can still be at the shrine.

## LV

### FLOWERING PIETY

“The beauty of holiness.”

PSALM xcvi. 9.

Here is a very significant passage from one of Robert Louis Stevenson's letters: “ ‘John, do you see that bed of Resignation!’ ‘It's doing bravely, sir.’ ‘John, I will not have it in my garden; it flatters not the eye, and comforts not the stomach; root it out.’ ‘Sir, I ha'e seen o' them that rase as high as nettles!’ ‘What then? Were they as tall as Alps, if still unsavoury and bleak, what matters? Out with it then and in its place put a bush of Flowering Piety—but see it be the flowering sort!’ ”

Yes, it is the flowers that offer the best witness to our religion. Flowerless virtue is never winsome, and yet how much of our piety never comes to the flower! It may be dutiful, but it stops short of being beautiful. The strength does not culminate in graces,



but remains rough and unrefined. Our God asks for the perfected offering, He looks for the finishing touch upon our work in order that we may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. He calls us to worship Him in the beauty of holiness.

Our righteousness must be of the flowering sort, it must express itself in goodness. Righteousness which does not effloresce in goodness is a very bleak and dingy thing. "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die!" Mr. Casaubon, in "Middlemarch," was a scrupulously righteous man, but no fragrant and exquisite goodnesses were to be found upon his tree. It had all the gloominess of the dark and sullen yew. Little children would shrink from such a shade. There were no flowers to gather. Strength but not beauty was in his sanctuary.

Our truth must be of the flowering sort, and it must bloom in the ministries of love. "Speaking this truth in love." Truth can be exhibited in such a way as to do the work of untruth. That is to say, true matter can be nullified by an untrue manner. Even the truth of the Gospel can be made unattractive



by the spirit in which it is proclaimed. Said a friend to me after a certain service, "Did you ever hear the love of Christ preached so bitterly?" The truth was maimed by its witness.

Our patience must be of the flowering sort, and must bloom in cheerfulness. Even patience can be grim and unlovely. But when it flowers there is no more beautiful plant in God's garden. It wins the wondering admiration of everybody, and is a powerful witness of the grace and love of God.

## LVI

### THE SOUL'S HARMONY

“Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name.”

PSALM ciii. 1.

“All that is within me!” It is when all things within me are in harmony that the soul exults in lusty and delightful health. But how to bring these independent and somewhat rebellious things into unanimity is the most serious problem in life. It is not always easy to get unanimity in a meeting which has been called to consider some question of public interest. Some would go this way, and some that way, and oftentimes they travel in quite opposite directions. It is not easy to get unanimity in a church. There are cranks whose erratic minds will never accept suggestions from other minds, and indeed they will not long be loyal to their own. It is not easy to get unanimity in a home; there are diversities of faculty, and mood, and temper, which are

prone to strike discords rather than harmonies.

But perhaps the most difficult of all things is to get unanimity in soul. To get the soul to pass a unanimous resolution! "All that is within me" at one! My soul is often like a tumultuous meeting, with interruption, and disturbance, and opposition, and I cannot get a unanimous decision. Or my soul is often like a disorderly orchestra, where each member is pursuing his own desire independently of all the rest. There are many members of the orchestra, and unless there are unity and community it is nothing less than pandemonium. Recall some of the members of the orchestra: affection, reason, conscience, will, humour, indignation, emotion, veneration, and all the varieties of the passions. Unless there is order among them, and mutual respect and dependence, and a common controlling purpose, there will be absolute chaos, and life will be "like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh." Yes, the most serious problem is this—how to get unanimity in the soul, how to get the "all things" to work together as one thing.

Well, this was the Psalmist's aspiration. He longed for unanimity in the movements of the soul. He wanted the "all things" to be strongly and sweetly co-operative in the service of praise. He wished every faculty to contribute its note in the harmony of worship. He was ambitious that the "all things" should be all there when he sought the Lord—all his thoughts and imaginations, his conscience and reason, his desires and his will—all moving together like some splendid band of music advancing toward the home of a king. "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name."

A disorderly orchestra is a fearful thing. Independent musicians, in the spirit of rebels, each playing his own instrument in sheer indifference to all the rest, fill the room with noise, and they add the burden of discord to all the other burdens of the hearers. And a disorderly soul is a fearful thing! When will acts in deliberate antagonism to reason! When passion gets out of bounds and comes into conflict with conscience! When imagination is out of tune with reverence! When humour acts in-

dependently of love! What a scene it is! It is a condition of civil strife. Everything is "at sixes and sevens." There is no music, for there is no community. A stray faculty may pipe its praise, but it is thin and powerless, and the worship is nothing worthy of the Lord, who is "great, and greatly to be praised."

"How are we to get this desired unanimity, so that "all that is within me" may "bless His holy name"? Well, an orchestra must have a strong and dominant conductor, to whom every member must render the tribute of obedience. What a transformation takes place when the conductor appears, and raises his baton, which is the sceptre of his realm, the symbol of his authority and power! At once every rebellious instrument is silenced, every indifferent member of the orchestra is awake, attention has a single mark, and purpose has but one goal. All the members become as one member, and they wait the will and preference of their leader.

And all my faculties need authority and leadership. There must be strong and vitalising control. There must be an ego

round which my powers gather like bees around their queen. The ego must rise above its members in undisputed sovereignty. Yes, the innermost self must reign; its rule must make orchestral harmony.

Yes, but how? I am as weak as a lath among my disorderly members. I stand before them like a babe before a disorderly orchestra. This is the secret of all my impotence. Any faculty can flout me, and act in sheer derision of my control. It is just here that the Lord Jesus comes in, with the amazing helpfulness of His divine grace. "Be strong in the Lord!" Yes, and that word is more correctly translated in the passive, throwing us back entirely upon God: "be strengthened in the Lord!" We can get our very self, our central, innermost personality filled and braced with the mighty spirit of Christ. Self can be so divinely controlled that it can control anything. The conductor can be made so imperious and so vital in Christ Jesus that every faculty will be constrained to do His bidding. Let the inner self and the Lord become as one, and "all that is within me" will come into tuneful order and harmony.

## LVII

### RENEWING ONE'S YOUTH

“Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things;  
so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”

PSALM ciii. 5.

I am impressed with the logic of these great words. It is the logic of life. “Who satisfieth . . . so that thy youth is renewed.” A certain sort of satisfaction is to issue in rejuvenation. When the soul is deeply nourished, the stale and weary life is to turn backward to its youth. That is to say, we are to seek the secrets of exuberance in the fields of the Spirit. It is a word which opens out a world of thought. For one thing, it suggests that a vast multitude of people, who are “growing old too soon,” are not suffering from over-work, as they like to tell us, but from spiritual starvation. They are losing their youth because they have lost or are losing their God. God hath set eternity within their hearts, and yet they are living as children of the passing day.



The unsatisfied life is one that lacks its appointed relationships. It is living as a barnyard fowl when it was purposed to be an eagle. It is imprisoned in the inch when it was planned to wander in the infinite. It houses itself in mean fellowships when it was ordained for imperial fellowships, and for the communion of the Holy Ghost. And thus it becomes disquieted because its princely powers are unexercised. It piles up things, but the accumulated things bring no relief. It multiplies its pleasures, but the many pleasures bring no joy. It plans and creates gardens of ease, but in the ease there is no peace. There is something wrong. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me?" And the entire explanation is found in the divine challenge, "Why spend ye money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" Life has been ordered on the deadly assumption that money can purchase the requisite nutriment, and that labour can secure the precious pearl of rest. God has been left out. And so the spirit of man grows old because it lacks the primary satisfaction.



But when God satisfies us with His good things the heart grows young again. "Thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." And this happens because young and youth-making things appear in the life. For instance, these three things appear, and they are all as young as the dawn:—Faith, hope, and love. How can any heart grow cold when these three dwell within it? And then, again, praise comes in. And what specific for the retention of youth can beat the spirit of praise? The Prophet was surely right when he said that the garment of praise supplants the spirit of heaviness. They cannot live together. A great worship always renews the springs of thought and will. And so it is in God that we find the fountain of renewal. We ought to grow younger in spirit as our years increase. I suppose that is one of the secrets of the tireless life of eternity.

## LVIII

### SAY SO!

“Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.”

PSALM cvii. 2.

You would have thought they could not have helped saying so. They have had marvellous happenings in their souls and they have said nothing about it. It is amazing what men can experience and yet retain their silence. It is possible to be a dumb participant in grace. There are emancipated slaves who never mention their deliverance. There are men and women, who have been lifted out of the horrible pit and out of the miry clay, who are never heard going along the road with a new song in their mouths. People receive marvellous comfort in sorrow, strange cordials and balms, who never refer to their healing. This is the tragedy of dumb discipleship. It is possible to come into the riches of the love of Christ and yet never to name the Lover's name. You would

think they would mention it because they could not help it. You would assume that their silence would be broken under the sheer compulsion of a great joy or by the equally powerful constraint of an upspringing praise.

But there is another reason beside that of common gratitude why we should open our lips in glad and reverent testimony. The sincere witnessing to a secret spiritual happening strengthens and enriches the experience. If I may so put it, we oxygenate our inner life when we give it sacred expressions. That is so with our feelings. Feelings that are dumb are apt to become faint. Gratitude which never says "Thank you!" has a very precarious life. Pity which hugs itself in secret soon passes away. These feelings are strengthened and confirmed by a wise publicity. And so it is with truth. We grasp truth with a firmer hand as soon as we begin to give it away. The disciple is never matured until he becomes an apostle. When we proclaim the gospel to another man it reveals itself in new brightness and glory. If we live unto ourselves we surely die. In this, as in all other

matters, the secret of saving one's life is to give it away; in losing it we have it for ever. And, therefore, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so."

And we must "say so" because the living witness is one of the great ministries by which the heavenly life is to be transmitted to others. We cannot overestimate the quickening influence of a really vital testimony to the renewing energies of grace and to the providential leadings of our God. When an honest man, speaking about these things, reverently and strongly says, "I know," his assurance seizes the timidities and the hesitancies of others and consolidates them into a regal strength. The firm and quiet word of the believer provides the antidote to panic, and transforms many a trembling deserter into a courageous soldier of the Lord. And never had the believer more wonderful opportunities for witnessing than he has to-day. It is the hour of the lay witness. Would that all the Lord's servants were prophets! Let us tell what we have seen; let us proclaim what we have known. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!"

## LIX

### THE WASTE OF CHRISTIAN INFLUENCE

“Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.”

PSALM cvii. 2.

It is their duty. The man who has been blessed is in duty bound to become a witness. The enriched disciple must become a busy apostle. He who has heard the word of life must himself become a messenger. “Let him that heareth say, Come!” Experiences must record themselves in expression. The world is waiting for witnesses, and especially for witnesses of the lay and unofficial order. The witness of the regular ministry is partly discounted because of our calling. Our testimony is expected, and it is thereby deprived of the element of surprise. But when a business man witnesses to the power of redeeming grace the testimony runs with arresting strength. It is this kind of witness who captures the interest of the jury and wins their verdict. The world, I

say, is waiting for lay witnesses, and too often their testimony is hid like a lamp put under a bushel. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so!" It is their duty to add the power of their experiences to the record of redeeming grace.

But it is also their sacred interest. Experiences which are denied expression speedily fade away. Expression confirms experience, it sustains it and enriches it. Sentiments which find no voice find it hard to live. Gratitude which never says "Thank you!" pines away in its silence. Expression gives air to sentiments, and quickens and strengthens them. It is ever so with a truth of revelation. We confess our hold upon a truth when we become its witness. Many doubts melt away like mist when our souls go into the open air of public testimony. When the disciple of truth becomes its apostle it clothes itself in more radiant glory. And so do I say it is our interest to declare what the Lord hath done for our souls.

"Ye shall be my witnesses!" That was our Lord's command. The world is waiting for our obedience.

## LX

### THE SPRING AT THE HILL

“He shall drink of the brook in the way.”

PSALM cx. 7.

“I beheld then that they all went on till they came to the foot of the Hill Difficulty, at the bottom of which was a spring. Christian now went to the spring and drank thereof to refresh himself; and then he began to go up the hill.” There is never any hill where that spring may not be found. Whenever life’s goings pass from the easy level to the steep gradient the Lord provides the refreshing spring. There are still waters just where He begins to lead me to the climbing and difficult “ways of righteousness.” Samuel Rutherford used to say that whenever he found himself in the cellars of affliction he began to busy himself in looking for the King’s wine. And whenever a pilgrim of Jesus finds himself face to face with some exacting duty in the highway of the



Lord it will be his wisdom to look about for the springs of inspiration which the Lord of the way has most surely provided.

On the reverse side of every duty may be found a corresponding gift of grace. Every call of the Lord has its complement in spiritual equipment. Every commandment is an inverted promise. All the demands of our God may be interpreted in the terms of His love. The measure of the one is the revealer of the other. A great calling means an equal bounty. If His commandment is exceeding broad it is because His love is exceeding deep. "As thy day so shall thy strength be." Reckon the hardness of the mission as the index of the endowment. Turn the duties round and think of them as the invitations of grace. Is there a steep hill before me? Then what a spring there must be! Is there hardship before me? Then what intimacies of divine friendship must be calling me! Is it to be a long, long road? Then what brooks I shall find by the way!

The trouble is, we see the hill and forget the spring. We take our task as a duty and not as a communion. And so life becomes



a statute and not a song. There is obedience but no devotion. Yes, there is duty but no piety, which means that we accept the hill and reject the spring. And yet the spring is there! "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!" "He shall drink of the brook in the way."

## LXI

### THE FEAR OF THE LORD

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”

PSALM cxi. 10.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning, but it is not a beginning which we can ever leave behind as a stake can be discarded by a sapling when it has grown stronger and more matured. This reverence is not a beginning in the sense of being a rudiment. It is a beginning which is carried forward through all succeeding stages, and even into ultimate issues. It is like the alphabet which, while forming the beginnings of literature, yet enters vitally into the loftiest creations of a Shakespeare or a Milton. Without the alphabet there can be no literature; without reverence there can be no religion.

It is in reverence that we must begin our quest of divine wisdom. We do not begin in faith, or in hope, or in love, but in vital

and creative reverence, even in the fear of God which is the foundation of life. When the veil is lifted in Isaiah's vision, the seraphim who stand before us are revealed in very significant endowment. Each of them has six wings: "with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly." Four wings for reverence and two for practical service. We need have no uncertainty about our power of motion if we have the requisite mood. Perhaps the reason why our two wings are so often ineffective may be found in the absence of the four. We are feverishly ready for flight, but we are not so ready to bow before the Lord and veil the face in reverent homage and communion. And may not it be that the two wings so frequently and so easily tire because they have not the restful support of the four wings, hiding the soul in the secret fellowship of God? We so often fail in service because we have forgotten or ignored the creative beginnings of things, which is the fear of God.

It is the mood of reverence which gives the soul its initial posture for discovering

the things of God. In the quest of divine secrets it is infinitely more necessary to have the reverent spirit than to have a learned mind. There is all the difference in the world between mere cleverness and spiritual discernment. One is just worldly sharpness; the other is heavenly vision. "I thank Thee that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes."

In matters of spiritual understanding the first requisite is a certain kind of mood rather than a certain quality of intellect. We enter the secret place not by logic but by disposition. Reverence has its own senses, its own discernment: it has intuitions which give the most assured experiences. I am therefore not surprised to read the sequence of the Psalmist's word, and to find that "a good understanding" follows in the wake of "the fear of God." The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.

## LXII

### THE FEAR THAT LIVES WITH JOY

“Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord,  
that delighteth greatly in His commandments.”

PSALM cxii. 1.

But is not this a strange association? Can two such things live together? Here are two sentences wedded together as the double yet single expression of one character. And what a wedding it is! It surely looks like an attempt at the union of things which are incompatible. There is fear in the one, and there is delight in the other, and they dwell together in one life. Fear and delight a wedded pair! What sort of fear is this which can live with joy? It is quite evidently not the fear which is associated with terror or fright. Fear hath torment, and this sort of fear terrifies a crowd of lovely things and drives them all away. The mental and psychological discoveries of our time have exposed the destructive influences of fear upon body, mind and soul. In every

realm fear is the minister of contraction. It is never the minister of expansion. Everything shrinks when terror comes in. It is even so in the body. The bodily channels shrink under the influence of fear. The pallor of the fearful means that the life-currents are shrinking away. And so it is with still subtler ministries. When terror comes in all the life-forces scurry away as to a secret lair.

And, therefore, it cannot be fear of this kind which the Psalmist means, for this sort of fear can never be at home with joy. This fear is destructive, but "the fear of the Lord is a fountain of life." The image is that of a spring of living water, and it is begetting and quickening all sorts of beautiful things, touching them by its vital influence into life and loveliness. And the fear of the Lord opens out such a spring of life in the soul, and the beautiful things of the spirit troop out at its bidding. Spiritual ferns and flowers appear. This sort of fear is the friend of the garden and not of the desert.

So it is not the fear which means fright. Our Saviour was always casting out that fear. How often He said, "Fear not, fear

not," and He was seeking to quench the destructive flames. Perhaps we may say that the real fear of the Lord is just the reverence of the Lord—only I am using the word "reverence" in its largest and richest meaning. In vital reverence there is something of admiration, and there is something of hope, and in its maturity there is something of love. And all these are powers of appropriation. They draw, they do not repel. They lay hold of their object, and they make it their own. And when this sort of reverence is fixed upon the Lord it is just an appropriating sensitiveness towards the Lord, and it presents to the Lord a mind and mood of eager hospitality. It is an apprehending "awareness" of God. And the awareness grows from more to more, and the line of its growth is always in the direction of increasing delicacy and refinement. It apprehends God, it apprehends Him more and more, and it becomes at last susceptible to a still small voice where once it only heard the thunder, and it becomes sensitive to a gentle breathing where once it only discerned the tempest.

And this sensitiveness to God is true

blessedness, for it is vital delight in God's will. It responds to the desire of the Lord, and in the joy of the Lord it finds the springs of its own joy. It is, therefore, the blessedness of communion, a blessedness which need never know decline. The advancing years will impoverish many other communions. As we grow older our fellowships shrink. But this awareness of the Lord, this communion with the Lord, can go on increasing even when the body is failing, and at eventide it will be light.



## LXIII

### LORDS OF CIRCUMSTANCE

“He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.”

PSALM cxii. 7.

Here is one whom we may call the Lord of circumstance. He does not feel that the end is come when some threatening rumour assails his ears. He does not stumble at the approach of frowning events. He is not the victim of panic, he is not the bonds slave of paralysing fear. He is calm, self-possessed, quietly confident. What is the secret of his strength and assurance? In what stronghold has his soul made her home?

“*His heart is fixed.*” That is the first part of the great secret. His heart is not a vagrant seeking every night some new doorstep for lodging and shelter. His heart has lost the dissipating lust of wandering. It has settled down, and has resolved to put life to the proof in one supreme test. And that must be our secret too. There are some

souls who are always on the road. They are vagrants. They have no settled habitation or abode. They spend a night with Theosophy, then a night with Christian Science, then a night with New Thought, then a night with Spiritualism, then a night with Jesus Christ, then—and so on, and so on! You never know their spiritual address. If we call at their last lodging we are told they have “gone and left no address.” They go everywhere, but get nowhere! They are without a home, and therefore without a kingdom. Such souls are like reeds shaken with the wind; any howling circumstance makes them its slaves. But this man of the psalm had ceased his light flirtations with everything and everybody. His heart was fixed; he had settled down.

“*Trusting in the Lord.*” That was the second and complementary part of his great secret. A God who could be trusted and he would trust in Him! That was the home of his soul, the dwelling place where his heart was stayed. God, the faithful God, supplied the major premise in all his reasonings. All his thinkings about everything began just here—in the holy, gracious, loving God.

Whenever he wanted to form a judgment about anything he began with God. "I am Alpha." He acknowledged that great affirmation, and God became the alpha in all his thoughts. His confidence rested in God, and there he made his rest.

And therefore he is not "*afraid of evil tidings.*" In the hurricane of circumstances he hears the still small voice. In the threatening furnace he sees "One like unto the Son of Man." This man's fight in life is not self versus circumstances. These are the combatants—a man abiding in the Lord versus any unfriendly circumstance that may stride along his road! And he is not afraid! "This is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith."

## LXIV

### THE TRANSFORMED ROCK

“The God of Jacob, which turned the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a fountain of waters.”

PSALM cxiv. 7, 8.

Who would suspect that a rock might be the home of a pool? Who would dream that waters were hiding behind a waste of flint? One expects to find a pool in green pastures where the cattle quench their thirst at noon. One would look for the spring in the shady wood, and there, in the home of the tender moss and fern, we should hope to see the fountain flowing. But there is no such familiar association in the figure of speech which is used by the Psalmist. It is the unlikely thing that happens. God has His pool in the hard rock. He makes the flint the slave of the fountain.

We never know, therefore, just where God is hiding His waters. His deserts are often disguised gardens. He hides His wealth in

the seeming waste. We have some very grim phrases in which the desert appears. "Hard circumstances!" "A hard task!" "Having a hard time!" All these phrases are suggestive of rock and flint. But the word of the Psalmist gives the assurance that the hard experiences may veil treasures of grace richer than we have ever known before. The rock may disclose unforgettable pools. The flint may give us the surprise of a fountain. Sometimes we are able to trace gracious issues in life to hard experiences. For instance, we know that easy circumstances are not the home of the finest fountains. It is in the place of difficulty that we find vitality. Think of those dry, hard problems in Euclid with which we grappled at school! When we mastered them we had found more than geometrical solutions, we had found a fountain of mental vitality. And sometimes we have seen the issues in higher realms. We had hard circumstances in our student days. Another man had easy circumstances. But it was the hardship that held the spring of life. And so it will be with other hard things which at present are only oppressive. If we only

knew it, as some day we shall, God is even now turning the hard rock into a pool, and the flint into a fountain of waters. Here, too, we shall make the great discovery that our hardships held the treasures of moral and spiritual vitality.

But I want to see the light of the Psalmist's word as it shines down another road of human necessity. Can God turn a hard heart into a pool of water? Yes, that is just the word of His grace. "I will take away a heart of stone, I will give a heart of flesh." Who has not seen such transformations? The hard heart changed into a home of gracious springs and rivers! Waters pure as crystal! Sympathies and pities like brimming streams! There is nothing more wonderful, nothing more lovely, than to see the once dry, hard, flinty life musical with the melody of springs and fountains. Look at Zaccheus, and then watch the waters flowing! Look at old Scrooge, and then watch God's springs!

## LXV

### WATER FROM THE ROCK

“The God of Jacob, which turned the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a fountain of waters.”

PSALM cxiv. 7, 8.

This is a strange and most unexpected fellowship of things. It would occasion me no surprise if I came upon a well in the garden of Eden. It would not awaken any wonder if I discovered a spring in the heart of a lovely valley, or rising on some sheltered upland, or in some nook on an open moor. But who anticipates rocks and springs? Who marries flints and fountains! Who would go wandering in a bare, grey valley of rocks looking for still waters? Who would search among the flints expecting to find the home of the gentle rain? And yet this is the combination which this word of God presents to us. Rocks are wedded to springs, and flints to fountains! And these are symbols of similar wonders which

are wrought in the realm of grace. And these are the experiences of brave, believing men and women who walk in the way of the Lord.

The saints of God find a plenteous supply of soft water in hard, rocky places. Fountains of grace spring up on the driest and flintiest roads. "Waters in the desert rise." God meets them in the ministry of most beneficent surprise. Let us look at one of these saints, and let us listen to his song as he journeys through the wilderness. For this is his song:—"In my distress Thou hast enlarged me." This man has been through hard experiences. He has been walking over a sharp and flinty road. Rocks have frowned upon him. No oasis of sheltering trees has relieved the heavy days. He has wakened in the morning to face a dry waste of trail, and he has lain down at night with the same sterile monotony before him. And what can you expect, in withering circumstances of this sort, except an impoverishment of his nature, a lessening of his capacity, and a drying up of all the genial currents of his soul?

But wonderful things began to happen.



To his amazement he found that the hard time was a growing time, and that in some strange way the tree of his life was sucking nutriment out of the desert. There were magic pools somewhere: vital fountains were hiding somewhere! His spiritual capacity was increased. He began to add a cubit to his stature. Hardship unveiled his treasure. He was like a fern which has been removed from the sunlight and placed in the gloom beneath the stage. And in the gloom new fronds begin to uncoil, and vital things happen in the shade which could never have happened in the light. He began to have larger views of things—larger views of God, and man, and human life. The hard things brought enlightenment. The rock proved to be the dwelling-place of springs, and the flint the home of the fountain. The desert was a fine growing place! “In my distress Thou hast enlarged me.”

Here is another of the saints of God. He is in captivity in Rome. Paul is shut in, walled in! His freedom has been changed into servitude. Hard? Yes, hard as a rock! A sharp experience? Yes, sharp as a flint! But now listen. “The things which

happened unto me have turned out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel!" Who ever expected it? One might expect "rivers in high places," but to have fountains in these dry places is one of the miracles of God's amazing grace. God's vitalising river of life is found in hard prison circumstances in Rome, nourishing the Apostle's life, and directing it, and multiplying its influences, even when it seemed hemmed in by imperious restraints.

And so it is. Experiences which are hard as rock do not separate us from the love of God. Disappointments which are sharp as flint do not sever our communion with His grace. God's wonderful waters can break through anything and everything.

## LXVI

### BESTING THE SOUL

“Return unto thy rest, O my soul.”

PSALM cxvi. 7.

“Why art thou cast down, O my soul? Hope thou in God.”

PSALM xlii. 5.

This counsel is very different to our ordinary practice in the common things of life. It is our ordinary custom to seek rest by dropping the bigger thing and taking up a smaller thing. We lay aside the book which severely taxes all the powers of our mind, and we turn for rest to a light novel or some loitering book of travel, or to a leisurely company of essays where the spirit is genial and where everything moves in quiet air and happy laughter. We rest ourselves in smaller fields. But the high counsel of the Psalmist takes us on quite another road. When the soul is tired and restless and disquieted he leads up from the smaller things to the greatest thing, even into the

wonderful Presence of God. The tired eyes of the soul are to be rested in wider vision. The anxious mind is to be soothed in vaster contemplations. The soul, which is burdened because of the greatness of its way, is to be lightened by being led into a greater way, even in the highway of our God. We are to find a vital rest in larger communion. "O rest in the Lord!"

And we may assuredly expect to find rest in the Lord, because the Lord is the only home of the soul. When we turn to the Lord, it is going home. "Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations." Sometimes we send our tired, ailing folk to the locality where they were born, and where they spent their early days. We say that it will do them good to breathe their native air. They are like plants that have got away from their native zone and have become stunted in the uncongenial air, and they are now taken back again to their appropriate clime. And our God is the native climate of the soul. When we are away from Him, we are vagrants in uncongenial country. In Him we live and move and have our being. And when we

breathe the heavenly air of His presence, the soul enjoys the restfulness of its own home. When the prodigal is in the Father's house they begin to be merry.

And if the soul is at rest in the Lord all the powers of our being will respond to the quickening touch of our native air. That is surely the interpretation of the sacred fellowship of the Holy Ghost. When we arrive in that hallowed atmosphere the fruits of the Spirit begin to appear, and these fruits are just our spiritual powers which have been released and refined and made robust and gracious by the nourishing ministries of the divine grace. Every power lifts itself in its native air. "All that is within me shall praise and bless Thy Holy Name." Sleeping things awake. Withered things come to life. Arrested things reach out to new strength and beauty. The soul has found its rest, and in finding its rest it has discovered its inheritance. It finds its rest, and it then goes to school in the amazing ministry of the love and wisdom of God. "Come unto Me and I will give you rest!" "Learn of Me and ye shall find rest!"

## LXVII

### THE GREAT WAYS OF GIVING THANKS TO GOD

“What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord.”

PSALM cxvi. 12-14.

But how strange and contradictory it appears! “What shall I render? . . . I will take.” One would have supposed that the succession would have been in this wise: “What shall I render? . . . I will give.” But the Psalmist has the innermost truth of the matter. The first and best return we can make to God for one of His gifts is to take a larger gift. What shall I render unto the Lord for my daily bread? The vitally essential answer would be this:—“I will take of the bread of life.” How shall I thank the Lord for His gift of sleep? By taking His greater gift of rest and peace. What shall I render unto the Lord for the gift of health? And here again the first return must

surely be in the form of a larger receptiveness. I thank God for my bodily wholeness by accepting His higher gift of holiness. The primary way of showing gratitude for the rain which has watered the parched ground is by receiving on my dry heart the plenteous showers of grace.

That is surely the way of the Psalmist. He has been contemplating the mercies of the Lord, and he challenges his heart as to what return he can make. "What shall I render? I will take the cup of salvation." He is now going to take the finest thing he can see upon the Lord's table. The Lord always keeps His best wine until the last, and the last of all will never come. Every succeeding gift is better than the one that went before it, and we best honour the Lord when, being thankful for the lesser gift, we joyfully accept the greater one. We do an ill thing to the Lord when we are profuse about His secondary gifts and indifferent about the better things upon His table. "My joy I give unto you." Have I taken that cup yet? "My peace I give unto you." Have I taken that cup yet? "This cup is the new covenant of My blood." Have I



taken that cup yet? The first true element in all acceptable praise is the readiness to take a richer gift from God. "What shall I render? . . . I will take."

But that is not the only form of thanksgiving we can make unto the Lord. It is fontal, but it is not final. It is the acceptance of a larger endowment for larger service. And so the Psalmist goes on to say, "I will pay my vows unto the Lord." With his enlarged capital he can now begin to discharge his obligations. He had made a certain covenant with the Lord. When the sorrows of death compassed him he made a vow unto the Lord. When he found trouble and sorrow he made a solemn vow unto the Lord. He said, "If I get over this I will live a more devoted life." He got over it, and now he will keep his covenant.

And who has not made similar vows when the darkness gathered about the soul? "If I ever get my strength back I will use it in the service of His Kingdom." Well, pay that vow. "If ever I get out of this darkness I will take a lamp and light somebody else through the gloom." Well, pay that



vow. "If the Lord will only give me the comforts of His grace, I will lead others to the springs of consolation." Well, pay that vow. This man's midnight vow was redeemed in the morning.

## LXVIII

### OURS BUT TO DO

“Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto all Thy commandments.”

PSALM cxix. 6.

The first question to be asked concerning any task is not whether it can be done, but whether God has commanded it. We often begin to engross ourselves with what we call the “possibilities of the situation,” when we have not stood still to hear the clear trumpet peal of the Almighty sounding forth the advance. When we get our eyes glued down to the peradventures of the road, to the “ifs” and “buts” and “perhapses” and “maybes,” they are apt to dull the spiritual senses, and the bugle peal becomes gradually a faint echo and loses its note of imperative command. We begin to doubt whether we ever heard the sovereign mandate and less exacting voices win and captivate our ears. Now, in all matters of

difficulty, the first and supreme question is, What has God commanded? It is not ours to discuss the matter on the basis of possibilities and probabilities. It is ours to act on the basis that the voice has spoken from the throne.

It is in the daring path of God's commandment that the frowning difficulty becomes illumined. The way is lit up as we tread it. There is no such thing in life as a road blazing with light from end to end. The way of God's commandment never appears like some noble street, with all its lamps burning, making a line of unbroken radiance through the night. The lamps are lit one by one as the traveller arrives at each part of the road. Light is given for the immediate piece of the journey. It is not far-off issues that are illumined, but the place of my feet. "I do not ask to see the distant scene, One step enough for me!"

And so God never gives vision to cowards, and for the all-sufficient reason that they could not receive it. Courage makes the soul receptive. It opens the windows toward the sunrise. It prepares the way of the Lord, and the King of Glory can come in.

When a man dares to obey the summons of the Divine commandment, and takes the difficult road, his divine capacity begins to increase with the beginning of the journey. Moral courage is always an expansive ministry in the soul. It makes the soul porous toward the Divine. The soul becomes apprehensive of the divine light, and it rejoices in hidden radiance and secret fires. The way of God's commandments reveals its lamps as brave men march along it. Forward into light!

What, then, has God commanded? That is the first and all-determining question. "Thou shalt—what?" Am I commanded to take that rough and ragged road which so soon loses itself in thick and impenetrable gloom? Very well, then, let me put on the whole armour of God and step out. "For behold darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon them and His glory shall be seen upon thee."

## LXIX

### THE OPEN EYE

“Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold  
wondrous things out of Thy law.”

PSALM cxix. 18.

I remember a word which was spoken to me by a very studious naturalist, a great lover of the things which are hidden in the quieter ways of God, “The wonders of one furrow.” And I remember a book which was given to me in my boyhood, which bore the title, “The wonders of a village pond.” Both these phrases associate wonders with commonplaces. The magic poetry is found in seemingly dull prose. But everybody does not see the wonders, everybody does not discern the magic lines, and this for the simple reason that they will not look for them. They do not bring an open eye, nor are they ready to give the needful pains. And so the secret treasures are never found.

And it is even so with the wondrous

treasures of God's law. It is a startling association, this of treasures with law. Who links together dry legalities and marvellous wealth? Who thinks of hidden springs in legal wastes? Who expects to find poetry in legal phraseology? And yet if we gaze deep into law, if, say, we pass through the dry legalisms of Magna Charta into its inner secrets we shall find the priceless treasure of a nation's freedom. There is a wondrous thing in that law. And I begin to see what one Psalmist meant who had deeply meditated on the law of God, and who returned from his meditation as one having found great spoil. He had found springs in what to others was only dry as dust. He had heard music in the voice of a commandment; for did he not come back singing, "Thy statutes have become my song!"

But if we would find these wonders in God's law, and if we would find still greater wonders in God's grace, there is imperative need of the open eye. There are eyes which are closed in sleep; they are in wonderful places, but they see nothing. There are eyes which are otherwise engaged; they are

absorbed in other things. They can be in Nature's loveliest lanes, and the lanes are no more than asphalt pavements. And so it is with the wonders of God's spiritual ministries. We can be blind on their side, and this because the energies of vision are entirely distracted by other and meaner interests. But there is one other explanation of spiritual blindness, the deepest and most common of all. Our eyes can be held in sin, and because of sin we see nothing of the daily moving wonders of God's marvellous love and grace.

And so when God opens our eyes He removes the radical cause of our blindness. The faculty of vision is directly related to spiritual condition, and therefore its redemption begins in the soul. The first necessity of clarity is purity. "Blessed are the *pure*, for they shall *see*." Our seeing begins in God's cleansing. "If I wash thee not thou hast no part with Me; ye cannot even see the Kingdom of God." And who knows just what deep sinful thing there is in the life which is destroying our spiritual vision? It may be something of which we never dream. Our great oculists often trace

defective sight to remote and seemingly incredible causes, and who knows just what hidden thing is damaging the optic nerve of the soul? Well, God knows, and His deliverance from blindness means the removal of every evil thing. "Lord, that I might receive my sight!" And with the sight we shall behold the wonders.



## LXX

### LAW AND LIBERTY

“I will walk at liberty: for I seek Thy precepts.”

PSALM cxix. 45.

Here is liberty found in the domain of law. The Psalmist passes into certain limitations and discovers a larger world. That is a sequence which is incredible to the worldling, but it is quite well known to the saint. The man of the world reasons that when he passes under law he enters into bondage. He imagines that when he is a law unto himself, that is to say, when he recognises no law at all, he enjoys a boundless circuit of freedom. On the other hand the Psalmist declares that to be under no restraint is to suffer the severest of restrictions, and that to welcome the yoke of God's commandments is to walk in the largest liberty.

Now there is no realm where the lawless are the free. In whatever way we wish

to go we must accept bondage if we would discover liberty. A musician must reverence the laws of harmony if he would exult in his lovely world. A builder must put himself in bondage to the law of gravity, or it is not a house which emerges, but a rubbish-heap. What sort of liberty does a man enjoy who consistently defies the laws of health? In all these realms to trespass is to be maimed, to pay homage is to be free.

But the principle has its supreme application in the realm of the spirit. When a man disregards the law of the Lord it may seem as though he has an unfenced world to walk in. Can he not do what he likes? Can he not go where he likes? There are no locks, no gates, no walls. The universe is his parish. And on the other hand it may seem that the man who accepts the restraints of the commandment of the Lord has only a park for his province, and not the bountiful freedom of the entire countryside. But all this is only a seeming, it is not the transcript of experience.

What has experience to tell us? Which of the two walks in liberty—the miser who defies the law of humanity, or the benefactor

who honours the law with all his heart, and mind, and strength? Which man is really free—the man who moves in falsehood, or the man who rejoices in the truth? Which of the two looks as if he had the privileges of a boundless inheritance—the cynic or the lover? Experience has no hesitancy in her reply. It is the slave who is really free: it is the law-bound who have perfect liberty.

And now I can see how the Apostle Paul can in one breath speak of being “called unto freedom,” and in the next breath glory in being “the bondslave of Christ Jesus.” He has found his rest in wearing a yoke. He has subjected his will to Another, and the submission has given him access into “the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

## LXXI

### DISCOVERING THE WORD OF LIFE

“It is good for me that I have been afflicted;  
that I might learn Thy statutes.”

PSALM cxix. 71.

In a letter to the *Spectator* a correspondent says: “If a modern man would know how much the Psalms can help, let him turn to them in the trenches. More than any other portions of the Holy Scriptures did they give me my message. I recall expressly the 23rd, the 63rd, the 91st, and the 121st.” In this welcome testimony he is only proclaiming one of the great findings of spiritual experience. The Word of God waits upon life, and it unlocks new treasure at the magic touch of appropriate circumstance. Some happening in our life proves to be the key to a closed casket, and when we bring the happening and the Word together the casket is opened, and the spiritual treasure is disclosed.

It is by no means needful that the key should be a heavy iron key, the symbol of some black experience. It can be a golden key, such as is used on some gay and festive day when we open a church or some home of cheery entertainment. Some brilliant happening in our life can discover wealth in Bible fields which we have never seen before. A triumph can open out a Doxology. A joy can be like the first sunny ray that struck the statue of Memnon and elicited a musical response. I can well believe that, when the travelling minstrel of old Judea reached the guest-house where he would spend the night, "the statutes which were his songs in the house of his pilgrimage" would reveal themselves in new and unsuspected glory. "Sometimes a light surprises the Christian while he sings!"

But the surprise is more surprising when some harsh happening smites the rock and the sweet, refreshing water gushes forth. It has happened ten thousand thousand times that a dark experience has discovered divine promises which we had never seen or scarcely noticed in the brighter days. We did not know the light was in the compart-

ment until we entered the tunnel. Some little Psalm begins to shine! Some word of the Master begins to blaze like phosphorus in the dark waters! Some word of an Apostle rises upon our darkening twilight like the evening star! And we begin to learn God's statutes in our afflictions.

It is a wise practice, if I may so put it, to expect these surprises of revelation. "The Lord hath yet more light and truth to break forth from His holy Word." Let us be on the look-out for it. Let us expect that each novel experience, whether it be grave or gay, is appointed to be a minister of revelation, and let us turn to the Word and watch for the unveiling. Let us regard our circumstances as the servants of our souls. An old word, read in novel circumstances, will reveal unexpected treasure.

## LXXII

### THE SPRINGS OF TEARS

“Rivers of water run down mine eyes, because they keep not Thy law.”

PSALM cxix. 136.

Here is a man before whose eyes the law of the Lord is blazing in incomparable splendour. In this wonderful Psalm, in all its windings of thought and adoration, the law of God is shining in every verse. There is not a single step in all its long journeyings where the Lord passes out of sight. We are never made to say, “It is gone for a moment, but it will soon return,” as though it were a temporarily clouded moon emerging again in the bare heavens. It is always there. It is as it is in some parts of Switzerland, where you can wander for a whole day, and the Matterhorn is never out of sight. “O how I love Thy law!” His eyes were continually filled with the glory.

And just because the law of God was continually shining before him he was pain-

fully awake to the presence of lawlessness. That is one of the divine ordinances of life. Refinement in one direction implies a corresponding exquisiteness in another. To be very sensitive to harmony involves an equal sensitiveness to discord. To be alert to the beautiful is also to be startled by the ugly. The great artist has to wear a crown of thorns. To respond to the noble means that one sickens at the shameful. If I glory in the law of the Lord, I must necessarily be deeply troubled when the law is broken. This is the order of life. Fine chords have a two-fold responsiveness: they are the ministers of joy and they are the ministers of pain. To enter into the joy of the Lord, is, in some degree, to enter into the sorrows of Gethsemane. To know the power of Christ's resurrection we are obliged to share the fellowship of His sufferings. There are light and dark sides to the same shield. Morning and evening make the one day.

And therefore I am not surprised that the Psalmist, whose soul is so sensitive to the law of the Lord, who delights in that law, and meditates upon it day and night, should weep when he looks round upon the lawless-



ness of men. It is like turning the eyes from spiritual order to carnal riot, or from some winged presence, fair and delicate as Ariel, to a coarse and grovelling presence like Caliban. And the Psalmist wept. How could it be otherwise? Josephine Butler was born and bred amid manifold types of order and beauty. Nature spread her glories outside her home, grace spread her glories inside the home. She gazed into the face of her Saviour and adored. And one day she saw the fallen womanhood of her country, and her heart was sick and troubled. "I felt that unless I went into the streets and cried aloud my heart would break!" The very strength of her faith was the cause of her sorrow. It was because she knew Him in whom she had believed that the wrongs of this blighted sisterhood scorched her soul like fire. It was because she could rejoice in the Lord that she could also weep with Him and share His bitter tears.

And therefore, "O for a closer walk with God!" That is the preparation for a more vitally human communion. All our springs are in Him, even the springs of our tears.

Our power to weep, with a Crusader's pity, belongs to the manifold power of the Holy Spirit. It is only by seeking a rarer spiritual refinement and a more appreciative realisation of the Lord that our senses will be awake to the sins and sorrows of the world for which He died.

## LXXIII

### GREAT FINDS

“I rejoice at Thy Word, as one that findeth great spoil.”

PSALM cxix. 162.

Men sometimes discover rich deposits of coal in land which seemed to be comparatively worthless. Oil wells have been recently found in estates that were apparently commonplace. Their owners did not know the wealth was there. They had traversed the fields a thousand times with no suggestion of the hidden treasure. Then some leading was given to them, and some deeper exploration was made, and there came the great discovery. It is something of this kind with the Psalmist. He is thinking of a man who has bought a seemingly commonplace field. He never suspected how much there was in it, and then one day he stumbles upon buried spoil. And the Psalmist says it was just like that with the Word of God. He had days of surprises when he came upon

deposits of hidden ore. He tapped secret stores of oil. He came up against massed treasure. And these surprises of grace filled his heart with rejoicing.

It is very strange what "finds" we have in the Sacred Word. There is some word with which we have been familiar for twenty years, and which has never revealed any specially arresting significance, and it suddenly flames with holy fire. One never knows when the discovery will be made. I am a strong believer in the revealing power of a new environment. A word which has been comparatively unsuggestive in one place opens out strange splendours in another. The same word, pored over in a garden, may display treasures which are hidden when we consider it in the city. And sometimes a word, which remained like a closed flower in the garden, will unfold its wonders in the dust and turmoil of the city. The fifteenth chapter of John, when read in the great vinery at Hampton Court, does, I think, unveil a depth of life, and colour, and significance which was not ours when we read it in our own chamber. There are many words which begin to display their

wealth when we meditate upon them by the sea-shore, when the tide is rolling in. Others seem to be susceptible to mountain presences, and they are wooed by the spirit of the mountains, and mountain country transforms many a plain Cinderella into a very shining princess. And so, when a word does not seem to display its treasures in one place, or we seek a deeper vein, let us try it in new surroundings. In the fresh environment, it may happen that deep will call unto deep, secret treasures may be discovered, and we may be astonished at the spoil.

And then, again, a change in our experiences is often the minister of discovery. Samuel Rutherford used to say that when he found himself in the cellars of affliction he always looked around for the King's wine. Some old familiar word turned out to be the vessel in which the rich vintage was confined. He never knew how rich he was until affliction revealed to him the wealth of his possessions. And so it is when we have another kind of change and pass into some radiant joy. The joyful time is a splendid time in which to look about for

spiritual spoil. In the clear, brilliant season there are words which open out their wealth as flowers open out when the sunshine falls upon them. Never let our faith shrink to so small a confidence that we think it is only the cloudy day which can reveal the spoil. I know that the clouds are God's ministers, and they are often marvellously friendly. I heard one girl call to another girl across a country road the other day. The other answered, "I thought it was you, but I couldn't see for the light." The light was in her face and hindered her sight. A cloud would have been very friendly and would have proved to be the helper of vision. And so it often is in the deepest things. The cloud helps us to see things more clearly. Many a shy word displays its wares in the cloudy day. I know all this, and I am grateful for it. But the cloud is not the only minister of revelation. There are spiritual treasures which troop out in our joys. The bridal morn can make some words fairly blaze with light! There are other words which unveil their riches at the end of a good and successful day's work. Yes, our successes can be fine explorers in the un-

searchable mines of God's Word. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, and every change, whether of condition or of circumstance, will make its own discovery of the hidden spoil.

## LXXIV

### THE SOUL'S HILL-COUNTRY

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills.”

PSALM cxxi. 1.

The pilgrim, approaching Mount Zion for one of the great feasts, lifted up his eager eyes unto the hills for the great glimpse of the place where God's glory abode, and where He deigned to commune with His people. On the plains of Babylon the exile fondly rested the eyes of his imagination upon those far-off hills that were rich with the witness of God's glory and grace, and which would some day resound with the good news of his emancipation. To the heart-sick captive of the plains that hill-country held the promise of dawn; it was the home of vision, the birth-ground of his most inspiring hope. In all his cold isolation, in his bereavement that was worse than death, and in his daily drudgery, this was the song of his heart, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help.”



And no soul can be healthy without its hill-country, its sacred heights whence come new mornings, and release from small limitations, and sense of space and outlook. The very monotony of the plains, the unrelieved stretch of dead level, becomes oppressive, and tends to afflict the soul with the feeling of imprisonment. I have recently met a noble Scotsman, a man who is doing great ministerial work out on the vast plains of Canada; and how that man's heart yearns for the hills and mountains of his native land! But in imagination he climbs them every day. He roams the well-known tracks to the well-known heights! The Grampians are on the prairies! Ben Cruachan and Ben More are nearer than his neighbour across the way. It might truly be said of him that "in his heart are the ways of the Highlands," as "the ways of Zion" were said to be in the hearts of the exiles of long ago. Such men carry their hill-country with them, and, passing through prairies or wildernesses, they fill them with springs and running streams.

And so must the soul lift up its eyes unto the hills. And the soul must climb its hills

even when its circumstances are like a low, monotonous plain. It must climb the mount of the revealed purposes of God. It must take a turn up the slopes of some outstanding promise. Get thee up into the high mountains of grace! Look up and get up where good tidings are born, and where thou canst see the land that is very far off! "Go stand upon the mountain before the Lord!" "If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God."

## LXXV

### THE GOINGS OUT AND THE COMINGS IN

“The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in.”

PSALM cxxi. 8.

The “going out” suggests the action of the early morning, when our strength has been renewed, and our purpose is refreshed, and enthusiasm has all the passion of an unspent fire. And the “coming in” suggests the close of the day, when the strength is exhausted, and the vision is dulled, and the enthusiasm has lost its ardour, and the soul crawls home in disappointment. And God’s blessing is to be on morning and evening, and both seasons are to lie beneath His hallowing love and grace. The “going out” may be the splendid venture of a young knight, newly baptised into the order of chivalry—keen, eager, glowing with holy passion, and riding abroad to redress human wrongs. And the “coming in” may be the return of that same knight, wounded sore in

the conflict, with his antagonists the apparent conquerors, and the clamant wrongs still crying for redress. And God's holy love is to be on the morning and the evening, and the knight is to be in the radiant circle of grace along the entire road.

Or sometimes our "going out" is in timidity and shrinking. We do not march as to the sound of a trumpet; we walk in fear. "I was with you in much fearfulness." Even Paul went forth in the consciousness of much weakness. We have to face untrodden roads. We are tasting novel experiences. We are confronted by new perils. Perhaps it is a boy going out to college. Or perhaps a graduate facing his new business career. Or perhaps a young student going to his first pulpit. Or perhaps a minister setting out on some difficult and unexampled task. Or perhaps a missionary travelling to his first field. And these are the beginnings of new ventures, and we go forth in trembling to the unknown task. "Thy goings out!" And then the comings in! Perhaps these seasons are more perilous, when we return from our shrinking venture with all our timidity gone! Nay,

perhaps wearing garlands of honour, and carrying trophies of victory. The victorious coming in! And God's preserving care is to be over both morning and evening, and we are to be kept from all evil.

All of which means that God's blessing does not desert us upon the threshold and send us forth alone to our alluring or repellent tasks. Our Lord is with us at the beginning and at the ending, and also between the beginning and the ending, even all along the road. "Having loved His own He loved them unto the end."

## LXXVI

### THE SOUL'S ESCAPE AND FREEDOM

“Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped.”

PSALM cxxiv. 7.

Mr. Figgis tells us of a man who is not a Christian, but who regarded the whole meaning of religious experience as summed up in these words of the Psalmist. And most certainly these words do suggest the great redemptive facts of escape and freedom. The soul becomes enmeshed in the net of circumstances, the fettering tyranny of sin and guilt and worldliness, and it cannot get away. The more it struggles the more it is entangled, like a bird which is caught in the net. The only hope of deliverance is by some strong and gentle interposition which will lift us out of the net and give to us the joy of winged freedom.

It is this entanglement which constitutes life's servile bondage. Our souls are so often

caught in the net. It may be the strong net of the passions. It may be the finely woven net of small worries, which can imprison us as perfectly as a net which is made of the cables of imperious vice. Or it may be that our business interests become our snare, and we get into toils from which we cannot escape. Our feet are fast, and we cannot use our wings. We are scarcely pedestrians, and we intended to be the "birds of God." We are in worldly bondage, though God purposed that we should "mount up with wings as eagles." And the trouble is, we think that by struggling with our bondage we shall gain our freedom. Yes, we say, "I really won't let things get such a hold on me." Or we say, "I am going to hold things more at arm's length." Or we say to ourselves, "I must deal strongly with that hand, I must show that I am the master." But we just go stumbling on, and the net is winding itself ever more desperately about our souls.

Let us listen to one who escaped, "Mine eyes are unto the Lord, for He shall pluck my feet out of the net." That is how we find our deliverance. It is not ours to do the

plucking up, it is ours to do the looking up. God will look after our feet if we look after our eyes. The soul that turns to the Lord finds a sure escape. This looking unto the Lord may be the dumb gaze of imperious need. Or it may be just the exclamatory cry, "Lord, help me!" But whether dumb or speaking the look means appeal, and confidence, and surrender. And as soon as such eyes are turned toward the Lord the spiritual deliverance begins. When God has our wills He can release our souls. The net is broken and we escape.

I can imagine nothing better for us to do than to read all that is said in the word of God about the glorious freedom which God purposes for His children. Let us read about the vast inheritance of the saints in light. Let us read about the height and length and breadth of the love of God in which we are to live and move and have our being. What a heaven of a home for the soul to soar in! And then let us read about the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. And then let our eyes begin to wander over the unsearchable riches of Christ. And when we are getting



some expanded sense of the freedom which is ours in Christ, let us look at the miserable nets in which we are entangled. Ay, let us look at them until we are ashamed of our shame. And then surely our eyes will be unto the Lord, and we shall cry for our salvation. And the Lord will lift our feet out of the nets, whether they be dirty nets of passion, or the seductive nets of vanity, or the small wiry nets of petty cares—He will lift us out of the nets. And when our feet are free we shall find we are provided with wings.

## LXXVII

### THE FAR-OFF INTEREST OF TEARS

“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”

PSALM cxxvi. 6.

Here we have the weeping sower and the joyful harvester, and the Psalmist unites them in the reach of the same vision. Sad and heavy days are seen in relationship with glad and exuberant days. And the happier conditions are not merely a change from the gloomy conditions; they are a sequence, a consequence, a vital issue, they are related as cause and effect, as seedtime and harvest. A divine “doubtless” is hidden in the process, and promises an inevitable progress and transformation.

Now no harvest ever comes of just “weeping.” Weeping may be only an idle evasion. We are sometimes tempted to allow our tears to satisfy our conscience. We weep over something and then we are snared into

assuming that something has been accomplished. Emotion is healthy only when it moves us to action. Without action emotion becomes stale and rancid. We may weep over these harrowing days through which we are passing, we may "water our couch with our tears," and nothing is accomplished. We are to be driven by our emotion to fields that are convulsed and broken by calamity, and in the awful furrows we are to sow our precious seed. For, indeed, the very groundwork of human life is nowadays strangely upheaved. Large fields of life, which have been as hard as iron, are beaten into dust. Hearts which have been callous as a wayside are sorely broken, and ready for the seed. And we are to go forth, weeping, endued with all the gracious sympathetic tenderness of our Master, and with exquisite carefulness we are to scatter the seed of the Kingdom.

What seed can we sow? There is the precious seed of the absolute dependableness of the holiness of God. Let us sow that seed on the stricken field. There is the precious seed of redeeming love and grace. "Kate," said Professor Elmslie to his wife, as he lay

dying, "we will tell everybody that God is love!" Let us scatter that seed in the bleeding rents of every riven life. And there is the precious seed of truth about vanquished death and resurrection glory, and the wonders of our eternal home in God. There is an abundance of precious seed. Let us be the sowers of the Lord, and let us go forth, weeping, bearing this precious seed, and we shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing our sheaves with us.

## LXXVIII

### BINDING UP THE BROKEN HEART

“He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.”

PSALM cxlvii. 3.

What a sweep there is in this Psalm! As, indeed, what a sweep there is in most of the Psalms! The Psalmists are like eagles which spread their wings and with mighty beat of pinion soar into lofty spaces, and after wide journeyings return to their own nest, where the eaglets are resting on a ridge of precipitous crag. The Psalmists move in tremendous circles of meditation, and they come back from their vast orbits to the tiny circles of their own necessities, and to their own wonderful relationship with the Eternal God. And here is a typical sweep of thought:—“He telleth the number of the stars, He calleth them all by their names; He healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds.” The strong singer sees

the mighty God in His immeasurable journeyings through unknown worlds, and then he sees Him as a good Samaritan on the little road to Jericho, bringing out His wallet of oil and wine, and ministering to a wayfarer who is lying bruised and broken by the way. His thought is like Wordsworth's Skylark, the ethereal pilgrim of the sky which is true to "the kindred points of heaven and home."

What kind of ministries have we for binding up a broken heart? Where can I turn, in all this great city where I live, for ligaments and balms which will make the wounded spirit whole? Where is there a hostel, which does not bear the signs of the Lord, where a wounded pilgrim can find the requisite skill and wisdom which will restore him and set him joyfully on his road again? I remember that George Eliot said, in her later years, and after what she called many heart-cutting experiences, that she had as many proofs as experiences that "opinions are a very poor cement for souls." And she was right. Opinions are very poor stuff for binding souls together. There is not the making of a tenacious friendship in

such a shifting material. And even kindred convictions are not much better, they do not offer anything much more adhesive. Two people can hold the self-same creed, but the creed does not help them in vital and intimate communion. And as it is in a society of souls, so it is in the individual soul. Opinions will not bind a soul together in strong and vital consistency. Nor will mental convictions make the spirit whole. Neither will opinions and convictions take the pain out of the heart, and stay its bleeding, and make it quiet in vital rest and union. If the hugging of opinions would do the healing, then what is called the New Thought has found the ultimate secret in life. "Hold to the thought," they say, "and the thought will do the rest." If I may use the Scriptural figure, these people are building their house with untempered mortar, and it will never hold together.

No, it is not holding to a thought, it is holding to the Lord. It is not the power of my own thinking, it is the Presence of the Great Physician. It is not a mental abstraction before which the soul must kneel. It is the living Lord, Who is the resurrection and

the life, and Who carries in His right hand all the ministries of redeeming grace. "Come, ye disconsolate, wheresoever ye languish, Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal."











